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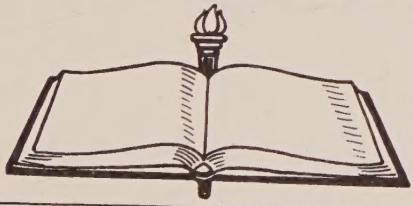

PRESENTED·BY

MR. JOHN ESAK

The Woman I Am

For they eat the bread of wickedness
And drink the wine of violence.

PROVERBS

The Woman I Am

by

AMBER LEE

New York
THOMAS SELTZER
1925

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TO

M. A. and A. A.

Je n'oublierai jamais . . . .

The Woman I Am

The Woman I Am

Chapter I

AFTER the acquittal they sent me to this place in the quiet New England hills. It is a sanitarium, not too fashionable. I have my own rooms in a small separate cottage and two nurses to look after me.

The thing is absurd. I am perfectly well. Of course, my hands shake now and then, and I have those terrible dreams at night. Dreams in which I see again the long, thin fingers with their peculiar old-ivory tinge, reaching out, crooked and menacing, touching, icy-cold, the little pulse in my throat. And I hear the soft voice distinctly, saying: "I am going to kill you, little Amber. And then I shall kill—*him!*" After that I go through the whole dreadful business once more, for the thousandth time, and see myself, as if in a mirror, standing, finally, over that great dark bulk, which chokes with the slow seep of blood in its open, astonished mouth, and lies twitching like some monster mechanical toy, defiling the soft rugs. I see the steady shining of the many shaded lamps; I smell the burning of the sharp perfumes that he loved. Then I wake, as a telephone bell rings somewhere, I wake—screaming.

The nurses are very kind. If it were not for the dreams I am sure I could do without them. But sometimes the dreams come in the daytime, in the sunlight, when I am wide awake. Then they are worst of all.

I am going to write it all down, just as it happened, if such things really do "happen" and are not meant to be from the beginning. Of course people know. It was all in the newspapers for anyone with a few coppers in his pockets to buy and read. But no one knows the whole truth. They wouldn't let me tell everything, the cautious lawyers wouldn't. It would ease me a little, I feel, if I could tell it now. All of it. I asked Miss Rogers, the blonde day nurse, to get me copy books and pencils. She must have spoken to the doctors, who, I fancy, said yes, as they are always urging me to occupy my mind. Anyway, I have the writing materials, and, lying here, in the long wicker chair on the little balcony, it does not seem hard to set it down. Yet it takes hours to write the simplest sentence. I don't know why. Perhaps if my hand would stop shaking it would be easier. I look at it sometimes, that hand—so small, so useless—and think what it has done, how quickly and cleverly it snuffed out the light of a human life, or a life nearly human. I find myself regarding it, that instrument of death, with detached curiosity, as if it were not a part of me but belonged to someone else.

I had better begin at the beginning.

The name I was born to? I do not know it. Nor who my parents were. There have been many stories, legends, rumors, circulated about my parentage, and one fable is as easy to believe as another, and as likely to be true. That I was a foundling is fact and not fancy; and that alien blood must run in my veins seems clear enough. I am fair, but not with the cold fairness of the north. A warm, red-blonde, warm of hair and coloring, with eyes once known as "golden" around half the world. I sometimes imagine that some ancestress of mine was an Italian, Venetian, perhaps. Somewhere I have read of the red-gold women

of the South, women passionate and undisciplined, lazy and sensuous, who used the dagger carelessly and knew the secrets of slow poison, who took lover after lover, lightly, who lived hard, and who died, by violence, and with regret.

I do not remember the Foundling Asylum. I was taken from it before I was a year old and was legally adopted by a middle-aged couple, living near Boston, who had no children of their own. I was brought up to call them mother and father, and shall continue to do so in this chronicle. When I was quite young they told me the truth, because my father did not believe in even comforting lies. He had been a minister, who retired from active service and took over a small school for boys in the suburb where he had lived for many years and been pastor. It was a tutoring school for Harvard, with never more than twenty pupils at a time, of whom only eight were boarders.

Father's name was Saunders, John Saunders. I don't know when it was that I first realized him, probably when I was about three years old and began consciously to recognize him as an authority. My memories of him and mother seem to date from that time. He was tall and very stooped, his hair was gray. He must have been an old forty when they took me from the Asylum. Mother was small and plump, a nervous woman, much concerned with her cooking and spotless housekeeping. We kept the same two servants the entire time I remained with my adopted parents. Mary and Delia. Gaunt, hard-working Irish-women. I had no nurse. Mother took care of me, or else, when she was occupied, Mary or Delia.

From the first my father concerned himself deeply with my mental and spiritual training. He would come to me after mother had prepared me for the night and listen to my prayers, mere gabbled, mechanical repetitions of

uninteresting words, not nearly as lovely as the "potry" I had already loved to learn and "speak." Then he would take me in his arms and sit with me in the old-fashioned rocker, the rocker with the broken springs and dusty, velvet seat and lace tidy, and hold my little, nightgowned body close to his breast, with, I am sure, an authentic pang of parenthood. He would gravely question me concerning the welfare of my soul. If ever a man strove to wrest a brand from the eventual burning, it was he. I remember one such occasion—I must have been about six years old—when he said:

"Jane"—so had they incongruously christened me—"Jane, do you love God?"

The memory of the question is so clear, the tone in which it was spoken so distinct to my present mental hearing, that it must have been put to me again and again. I also recall my answer, at least on one occasion, with equal clearness. For whether or not I invariably gave the same reply I cannot say. This once, then, it was:

"No."

Uncompromising enough. A period of spiritual wrestling probably followed, of which all I recall is that, after an exhausting hour, I said:

"But how can I love someone I've never seen?"

What his response to that was I don't know. Certainly, Faith in the Unknown is inborn; it cannot be learned.

As time went on, he tried to show me all that God must mean to the Christian child. A sort of super-Father, to be loved and dreaded at one and the same instant. I could comprehend neither the love nor the dread. Doubtless, in my child's way, I thought them incompatible. I know now that they are not.

Father would fall back on the old catch-phrases.

"Yet you love me, your earthly father?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Why?"

I recall that I pondered this. Why? Why? *Why* did one love?

"You're good—to me . . . and give me pennies . . . and kiss the bumps . . . and play at doll's house. . . ."

It generally came back to the giving end of it. Even at six I was a rank materialist.

My next outstanding memory is of being sent for, at about eight years of age, to go into the big "best" parlor, to me almost forbidden ground, the place of mystery and enchantment in which parents of prospective and established pupils were received, there to encounter a younger brother of my father's who had made his home in the Orient and had not visited America for twenty years. He was a big man, yellowed by malaria, with eyes the very same as my father's in shape and coloring. But there the resemblance ended; even my young eyes detectd a "difference." As I think back, it seems to me that Uncle Paul's eyes were bright and searching and coolly wise, while father's were the hot, unsatisfied eyes of the dreamer and mystic.

I was presented to my new relative and told to call him uncle, and at once lifted to his knee. My chief concern, I remember, was for the fate of my best dress, a high-waisted, round-necked white affair with many starched ruffles, into which I was put on state occasions only, with many stern admonitions from my mother to "keep it clean."

Uncle Paul had a nice lap, and I liked the smell of him, a leather-and-smoke smell, masculine and virile. It set the nerves tingling. Father smelled of leather, too, of pleasant shabby clothes and good soap, but never of smoke.

"So this is the child?"

"Yes."

"Extraordinarily beautiful," said my new uncle, without much enthusiasm.

I looked up from a contemplation of the curious jade charm he wore on the heavy gold of an old-fashioned watch chain, and saw the quick frown cross my father's lined forehead.

"Hush! She must not be made vain. In vanity lies destruction."

Surely, a prophet!

Uncle Paul laughed outright.

"She'll be vain soon enough. All your preaching and guarding cannot stay her. There are mirrors about, and eyes, her own and others. After all, John, beauty is gold and rubies in the hand of a woman, rightly used and properly valued."

It was a warm mid-summer day. The two men talked in low tones, and through the open windows I heard the heavy bees humming in the ramblers and honeysuckle vines. It was cool in the best parlor, but close, with a musty odor as of quiet things decently decayed. I leaned my red-gold head against the buttons of Uncle Paul's coat (I had never seen men in white linen suits before and it impressed me as I thought vaguely of the baker down in the village and of pictures of story-book millers), and lying so, lulled by the voices and the summer sounds, I drowsed. I felt the arm about me tighten a little and make me more comfortable. For a few moments I slept soundly. Presently a sound outside, a carriage perhaps, woke me, and I heard Uncle Paul saying:

"She is fast asleep."

"Wake her and put her down," suggested father.

"No, let her stay as she is. Well, John, are you satisfied as to the success of your experiment?"

"She is a good child," father answered evasively. "Not, perhaps, as spiritually awakened as I would wish. But that will come. In God's good time. Now, she clings hard to the tangible things of life. She is almost pagan in her worship of beauty, of sun, of flowers, of silks and satins, even of a pretty woman. I never saw a child like her. Jewels, now. She was once in the room when the mother of one of our boys called and for a full half hour sat never moving her eyes from the pearls the woman wore around her neck. That night, after I had heard her prayers, she asked me quite gravely to give her some of those 'white beads' on her birthday. I tried to explain what the 'white beads' represented. She did not seem to understand. She would pray for them, she said. I told her God would not give them to her and she said I had assured her that prayer was answered. Not selfish prayer, I told her. Then she asked me, quite solemnly, if it was selfish to pray for food when you were starving. No, I said. What she was trying to tell me in her baby-way was, I suppose, that what food was to the hungry, the beauty of the jewels was to her little soul. Value she did not grasp. Money means nothing to her as money. She cried, bitterly. When she stopped crying, her mother, who was with her, heard her say, 'I will have them! I *will!* Hundreds and hundreds—from my throat to my skirt!' She was reprimanded, but shut her soft mouth firmly on another 'I will! You wait!'

"When her birthday came, yielding to a foolish impulse, I bought her a little string of inexpensive 'pearl' beads. Her mother objected, but I prevailed over her good common sense, and took the beads to Jane. She thanked me, laid them aside and went on cutting out her new paper dolls.

I was hurt, out of all proportion. 'You don't like them, Jane?' I asked her. She looked at me with such a strange, old look. 'Very much, father,' she answered. But she has never worn them."

I can recall almost every word, just as he spoke it, probably because the incident is clear in my mind from the standpoint of the little girl. I had never seen anything like the sheen of the woman's pearls, wonderful, soft, shining things, round as the world we live in. She had lifted me on her lap—I was a child people liked to handle—and I had furtively felt of the jewels. They were not soft, as I had somehow fancied, but hard to the touch, cool and heavy. I loved them with a very great love. It has not left me to this day.

When father brought me his pitiful little offering in the shape of the birthday beads, I think I was truly insulted that he could believe me, for one moment, deceived by the soulless things. Not heavy, not cool, not shining, not even gliding-smooth. I knew I had hurt him. But I could not wear them. Second best has at no time in what people are pleased to call my "career" appealed to me.

To return to Uncle and the best parlor.

I must have drowsed off again but awakened again to hear Uncle Paul saying:

"You know nothing definite about her. You guess much. What of heredity?"

"Environment is more powerful," my father answered. "Even the doctors admit that now. What could harm her in this home, this simple, Christian home? Granted that there are dormant instincts for evil—although, mind you, I do not admit it—but, for the sake of argument, grant it—well, what could stir them here? There is nothing for her here, Paul, but love. Love of God and man and peace."

"*That* for the doctors!" His brother snapped his fingers. "What could awaken those instincts, you ask me? I answer, everything and anything. The sun and the roses that she loves so much—the harmless sun, the red rose—or a string of pearls."

I remembered the conversation because I was always listening for new words. I loved new words. And "instinct," "environment," "heredity" were all new to me. Later I tried to find them in the dictionary, but was not yet able to spell. So I questioned, rather cleverly, not father, but mother and Delia and Mr. James, the assistant tutor, each singly. It was many a day before the real key to their meaning came to me, but the attempt to learn it then helped to impress the talk on my memory. It was even a longer time before I realized that the conversation had centered around me, myself.

At this juncture my eyes must have been wide open, for Uncle Paul with a soft "Hullo!" set me down gently, and father told me I might go. I ran, gladly enough, into the dangerous sunlight, my little mind alive to the wonder of the new uncle and the new, long words.

It seems strange that I have already written so much and said so little about Mary Saunders, my mother. She counted, to me, for so much less than father. When I was very small I thought of her chiefly as a warm lap, a binder of wounds, a cook of surpassing excellence. I have eaten in many houses, public and private, and in many countries, but I have yet to find the culinary perfection that I knew as a child and as a young girl. Later, mother represented authority itself to me, but an authority easy to deceive. One lied to her better than to father. She punished me frequently, often unjustly. She had a quick temper. I do not think she ever loved me much, but she was good to me

after her fashion. She took me on trust, as it were, rather as if I had been a toy, a treasured toy, of father's for the welfare of which she was responsible. She was not a maternal woman. All the maternity in her had gone into the love and jealous care of her husband. She always saw in him the boy who had first won her; under the stoop and the gray hair she saw that he had remained the same boy, whereas she had grown old. She must have been old at twenty. From the evidence of her picture she must have been an exceedingly pretty girl, at eighteen, when she married John Saunders. Her picture as a bride hung in their room over the great double bed, a simpering picture of her in an ugly old-fashioned, high-necked wedding gown, with her white gloved hands held stiffly in her lap. Even in that uninspired photograph the eyes were young and wondering and eager, the small mouth sweet, and the little head heaped high with hair under the unbecoming veil. She was already plump, but with the round, deceptive curves of youth. Her figure must soon have settled into the dumpy, unbeautiful thing it was when I knew her.

Another childless woman might have taken my beauty and mischief to her heart and cherished them both—and me. But it was father who cherished, and I think she was always jealous. She wanted him to hold her as he was held, she wanted to be all in all to him, as he was to her, which was not possible. It rarely is. However, she did her conscientious best by me, and on her shoulders no burden of the blame can rest. I have often wondered whether, had I had a mother, a real mother, adopted or of the flesh, things would have been different. But the question is a form of self-deception, the question to which I have so longed to answer yes and, in a measure, absolve myself. Things would *not* have been different, would not have been altered one jot.

From the time I left the Foundling Asylum, a crowing baby with little grasping hands, I was headed straight for that long, lamp-lit room, for the sodden figure staining the silken rugs and the hardwood floor. And yet, even now, I do not wholly believe in Destiny alone.

Chapter II

MY father's brother did not remain with us long. While our guest, he endeared himself to me by many little gifts, most of them produced from his trunks and from an old-fashioned shawl-strap. Crystallized fruit, ginger sticky with sugar, lichi nuts, a little Chinese girl's costume which filled me with especial delight, and all manner of jade trinkets and hairpins. Mother was greatly disturbed by this mid-summer Christmas, but Uncle Paul prevailed over her warnings and refusals, more, I am inclined to believe, because he disliked her, than to give me pleasure.

As for me, I was much intrigued by his unfamiliar personality, and I followed him wherever I could, like a small puppy, friendly and anxious. Although he was confessedly an old bachelor, I was secretly convinced that he had a Chinese wife across the mysterious seas.

After he left us, I never saw him again, yet his personality is as strong in my memory today as it was a week after he was gone. He died, I have since heard, at a ripe old age, without again making a pilgrimage to the land of his birth. He must have been gravely disappointed in the States, and old Mother China must have set her mark on him and called him back. Perhaps my childish guess at this was not wholly fantasy; there may have been a little sloe-eyed woman with shining black hair waiting for him in Foo Chow. Who knows? In a way I like to think it was

so, for there was something about that great, lean man which made the bizarre seem natural.

As I have remarked, he did not like mother. For one thing, he was a renegade from the faith of his fathers; had turned, he said, agnostic. My father grieved over this deeply, and tried his utmost to lead Paul back into ways of righteousness. Paul respected father's feelings and the missionary spirit that sprang from them, the anxiety to lead this elderly lamb who had strayed from the fold back to the Lord. Mother, however, was not grieved; she was merely horrified. It irked her, I imagine, to sit at a table with a "heathen" and to compensate herself for having to break bread with him she hardly let him have a meal in peace. He was quite bitter against our missionaries in China, and mother, who was president of all the church mission boards or whatever they were, could not forgive him. She was an ardent supporter of the Missionary, and it was as if Uncle Paul, perpetually, and with malice, trod on her most tender spiritual corn every time he opened his mouth to allow some disparagement of the missions to come forth.

For another thing I do not think he liked me; or else he was not fond of children in general and me in particular. He doubtless disapproved so much of my presence in his brother's house that he could not bring himself to care for me. I was a striking-looking child and that, too, antagonized him. He used to watch me for minutes on end, and I would grow restless under the long, close scrutiny. Beyond doubt he was speculating about me, wondering just what type of butterfly this unusually gaudy cocoon would hatch. Finally, I am sure the house oppressed him and he was glad to leave it and return to his own house, which I pictured as built of china-ware, in the manner of a pagoda, and set in

strange gardens, with little brooks and bridges and weeping willows.

So he left us, and for a little while I missed him, although I loved him not at all. He had been new to me. And newness was magic.

If the house had exercised a sinister influence over Uncle Paul one cannot blame him. It depressed me unutterably. I hated it instinctively and yet it was, in a sense, the only home I have ever known, in a life in which houses have played a considerable part. It was a frame structure and of a dark brown color that, could one taste color, would have been both salt and bitter to the tongue. The trim was a dingy, moth-eaten green, and the lace curtains at the tall, narrow windows were limp and lifeless things, much darned and mended by mother's clever and economical hands. Within, the carpets affronted the eye, as did the wall-papers. The rooms were echoing and high-ceilinged, narrow and long and uniformly dark, the stairs steep and winding. The several class-rooms were as barren of beauty as any rooms could well be. The dining-room, on the parlor floor, was large, with brown walls and massive furniture. Meals in such gloomy surroundings were not feasts. The boarders, poor boys, slept in a dormitory which, with the lavatories, ran the length and width of the third floor, for the house was tall, with three floors, an attic and a dusty, hideous cupola, used as a sort of store-room.

The attic itself was not so bad; it had little dormer windows which I loved, and trunks, filled with ancient garments and bits of cloth, which I was sometimes permitted to explore. The room that mother used as a sewing-room on the second, bedchamber floor was the best of all in the house. It was octagonal in shape and had many windows and was "done" in a cheerful, faded Turkey red, not un-

lovely as it mellowed to a color that was nearer old rose than the original shade, and it was cosily overfurnished with comfortable, shabby chairs, sewing-tables, and the great basket that was always filled with the boarders' socks. And on the faded, flowered wall-paper were Godey prints and a sentimental Marcus Stone. Mother's sewing-machine stood there, a plump, hard foot-stool guarded her special chair to accommodate the small feet which dangled from very short legs. At several of the windows stood flowering plants, very gay in winter.

I was allowed to play in this room while she sewed, and it was there that I graduated from strings of wooden spools on a bit of twine to picture books which I would peruse flat on my round stomach, my slippered feet crossed high in the air—an attitude that was deplored, so that when mother was present, I read sedately on a hassock, my legs in their long, thick stockings decently disposed of, my heavy hair combed back with a round comb, rather like Alice in Wonderland, a little girl I had often envied. For years I searched the garden and grounds for a rabbit hole, symbol of escape from the commonplace.

Here I was taught sewing, for which I developed a talent, and on snowy afternoons when lessons with father were over, or a spell of cooking in the big, dark kitchen had triumphantly ended in a loaf of crusty bread and my duties there were over, I was set many a long stint, after the fashion of an earlier day.

My own bedroom, merely an alcove with a door, opened out of the parental bedchamber. It was a cheerless place, furnished with a single iron bed, a mirror that whether by accident or foresight, hung too high for me to really see myself in and which was, into the bargain, speckled and eccentric with age, a chair, a washstand and a chest of

drawers, which I have since realized was a very lovely, dignified piece, with fine lines and of old, mellow mahogany. I did not care for it, I coveted the marble-topped atrocities in mother's room. I had no clothes-closet, but a wardrobe, a huge affair that terrified me lest it topple and crush me some fatal day. And I recall perfectly that the washstand pitcher and soap dish and basin and tooth brush mug did not match, two of these useful articles being white china with blue forget-me-nots and the other two a ghastly pink, rimmed with gold that was eaten away in spots.

There was also a bathroom on this floor. The boarders had their own, a more modern affair, and Mary and Delia, who slept in sloping rooms under the roof in the attic, used ours. I shall never forget it. It had a tin tub, antiquated even in those days, and a leprous basin. Oilcloth covered the floor, an oil stove burned there in winter. The faucets were dingy and the water never hot. The tiny window was glassed below with an opaque glass for which I do not know the name, and at the top with a piece of red and yellow stained glass of a pattern of impossible tulips. That bathroom typified to me all that was ugly in life. I am not astonished that I eventually escaped from it.

No, the house was not beautiful. I have often wondered how it affected father, who was a gentle soul and who loved lovely things, although, with that streak of cast-iron which ran through his softness, I believe he censured himself for any affection for perishable objects—perishable in the sense of worldly.

But if the house was dreadful, the garden was exquisite. Part of it was beauty blurred with the rigid horror of set beds, nor was the tennis court, which father had put in for the boarders, a thing that pleased the eye, its wire backstops naked to the wind, not a vine came to clothe them. But

beyond all this, before one came to the small kitchen garden, in which a man-of-all-work, a half-witted creature, labored, was a wilderness of half-neglected hedges, shrubs, trees and flowers. Sturdy box grew there, and at the end of a rickety trellis, burdened with a massive grapevine, there was a little, ramshackle summer-house which I adored. Vines wrapped it about, it was a secret and screened place, and I spent much of my spare time there, even in winter. At the entrance to the grape arbor, or just beyond it, guarded by an old, bountiful rose-bush, there was a sundial, on a rather high pedestal of lichened stone. A little girl could stand by it and trace the figures on it easily enough. It was almost as tall as she, but not quite. Ivy overgrew it, the time was hard to read, and there was a Latin inscription. When I was just tall enough I pulled the cloaking leaves away and, tracing the words with a grubby finger, spelled them out letter by letter. They were hackneyed words and there were only two of them—*Tempus fugit.* But they were not hackneyed to me when first I read them.

Oh, yes, at such an early age. For my lessons with my father were not the average three R's of the girl-child. He had great plans for me, and taught me himself, refusing to send me to any local school, public or private. My lessons took place in his "office," a shabby study off the dining-room, at regular hours in the early afternoon, when the boys did not claim him. I learned Greek and Latin along with the rudiments of English grammar. Mathematics, oddly enough, were reduced to simplest forms, and history was at first sketchy and disliked, until I began to learn it by the fascinating medium of carefully selected novels, contemporaneous with, or treating of, the countries and the times under consideration. Literature was my best and most beloved study, and, added to my foundation in the alleged

dead languages, I was afflicted with three living ones, my own, French and German, the last two-named "taken" three times a week under the supervision of the visiting language tutors who came to devil the poor boys daily. I recall the French tutor as a man more like an insect than a human, black and thin and active, easily moved to wrath; whereas the German, in contrast, was a fat creature, bearded and blond, with white teeth and a trick of wearing his spectacles shoved up into the waves of his corn-yellow hair. I liked them both and studied well for them.

Geography father taught me by a system of wonderful travel stories supplemented with maps. Spelling and writing came to me naturally, and from very early childhood I wrote a pretty, legible hand, but I never had a flair for figures, as my check books show to this day.

Tempus fugit. I knew it, I sensed it even in the irresponsible time of childhood. The years seemed very long. From Christmas to Christmas there stretched an impossible bridge of weeks and days and months, a bridge built of hours and minutes, longer than anything in the world. Yet somehow I knew that this was mere seeming, a deception, a delusion. Time only played at standing still. In reality it rushed, drawing more lines in my father's face, powdering with white my mother's abundant hair, pulling me with it, breathless, lengthening my skirts almost before I knew it. In a word, it flew, and I felt that I needs must fly with it, that life was a short word and that I must interpret it to the fullest. . . .

I do not know when I first began to realize boys. For a long period I regarded them as necessary atoms of life about the house, associating them with the dormitory, the bleak class-rooms and the tennis courts. Later they took on a more definite and personal meaning, and emerged

from the general background as rude, strong creatures, quick to tease, equally quick to conciliate with a lollipop or a piece of forbidden chewing-gum. As playmates they did not enter into my scheme of things; all save the most formal intercourse with them was not to be thought of; even the teasings and conciliations took place under parental eyes. Too, the boys themselves looked down upon me from a vastly superior height; they were for the most part great, grown creatures, of Going-On-Twenty or so, and I was tacitly expected to regard them with mingled awe and rapture. As a matter of fact, I was wholly indifferent to them until I reached fourteen, when the unusual attentions, secretive and compelling, of a red-haired boy of some seventeen years, from, I recall, Bangor, Maine, drove the fact home to me that boys were curious forces, capable of direction in feminine hands.

That poor boy! I have forgotten his name, but I remember his quick, light-blue eyes and the many sticky gifts of sweets that he left for me in our private cache, the hollow trunk of an old tree back of the summer-house. It was in the summer-house that I managed to meet him for the first time away from walls or the open lawn, and where he, not quite unexpectedly, kissed me. My first kiss! Much has been written about this primary encounter of masculine lips with the virgin feminine pair, but I can add nothing to the sum of knowledge. All I can say is that while I found it exciting it meant no more to me than a timid, muscular arm around my little girl waist, stiff in my first corsets, a husky, slangy whisper, and the hard, boyish pressure on my mouth, which felt the first scratchy symptoms of the young beard more acutely than any strange rapture.

But, after a fashion, it helped to mature me.

This escapade lasted no length of time; it was almost

immediately broken in upon by mother, who came prowling once through the garden in search of me and heard the whispers and also the giggle which, I am sure, directly followed the kiss. That was sufficient to send her flying into the summer-house, there to wither the surprised youth, whose face, I am certain, matched his hair at the moment, and to drag me forth, reluctant, to face my father.

I was well aware that "young ladies," let alone mere little girls, did not kiss strange or familiar young men, or even little boys. It simply was not done. Such was the mendacious creed in our family. I had committed a crime, yet I was not wholly prepared for its terrifying effect upon father. He turned unnaturally white. But the long talk with me that followed in the dusky study was delivered more in sorrow than in anger. More in fear than in sorrow. I seemed, by my action, or more accurately by my passivity, to have confirmed some deadly alarm of his. I know now what it was. It was the first outcropping, so he fancied, rightly or wrongly, of that mysterious heredity of which he and Uncle Paul had spoken on that drowsy summer's day, six years previously. I do not recall much that he said to me, being more concerned with how he *looked* as he said it. I imagine that he spoke much as any parent would have spoken in like circumstances, warning me that I would cheapen myself by such casual surrenders, counselling that my lips must be "kept for my husband." Even at that early age it must have occurred to me to wonder if, by any chance, that nebulous and unknown husband were paying me a like attention. Further, I am sure he told me that I had hurt and grieved him by such reprehensible antics. I know I was properly sorry, or thought I was, and cried quarts on his shoulder. And was forgiven.

Mother was plainly disgusted with me. She had the look

of the truly puritan-minded prude. An unlicensed kiss was to her almost synonymous with rape. She had certainly kept *her* lips unsoiled from careless contact until she was given into father's safe keeping. And I do believe that, in her heart, a little I-Told-You-So bird sang with malice and rejoicing. After all, what could one expect from a foundling?

It was, perhaps, this episode that caused my father to tell me of my adoption. I am sure that the two new lessons were almost coincident. He told me gravely and regretfully, and I knew he wished me to feel that by some impossible alchemy of love he was my father in body as well as in spirit. I remember I was less distressed than seemed natural. I had always possessed a talent for dramatizing myself as Heroine in many a long romance. To be An Adopted had a savor of fairy tales. How very dull, in the last analysis, to know one's parents, to see them every day. How final and uncompromising. Once the actual knowledge failed, there remained any number of charming possibilities. I pictured my unknown parents as, respectively, millionaire and beggar maiden, as prince and peasant, as rake and actress. Possibly this last conjecture, made at a time when stealthy novel reading of a lurid type had become like a drug that I craved with an almost physical craving, was the nearest to the truth. I shall never know. But I was glad, deep down, yet ashamed of being so, that I was not literally of my mother's too, too solid flesh. Oddly enough, loving father as I did, the realization that in my viens no blood of his ran to redden my cheeks and pulse in my finger tips hardly distressed me. I loved him as I had ever done, and nothing concerning him seemed changed. I know now that he harbored well-founded suspicions concerning the identity of my parents, or, at least, of one of them. But he never told me, not even later, in an hour when all things were

made very clear between us. And, curiously, it was not until I was a woman grown that it occurred to me that my parents had probably been illegitimate, in the correct usage of that abused term, and that I, therefore, was the fruit of a furtive union, with lawlessness knit into my very fibers. When this thought did come to me it carried with it so great a weight of conviction without proof that I am convinced of its essential truth.

The red-haired boy, while he satisfied my first curiosity on the subject of actual contact with the eternal masculine in the flesh, did not have the honor of first arousing in me speculation on sex in general. That inevitable phase had set in when I was much younger, about seven, I think, though I note that in the majority of more or less veracious accounts of puberty and adolescence, the age given is not so early a one. Yet I do not think I was abnormal. It was being friends with a slightly older and wiser girl with a mind for research that gave me the semblance of precocity.

Bella Winston was about ten at the time of which I speak. She was the only child of the local doctor, and as our parents were friendly I was allowed to play with her and with other carefully selected small fry of the neighborhood. Good over-worked Doctor Winston did not guard his medical books as he should have done, and Bella and I spent many an entranced hour in her attic pouring over the heavy volumes with their horrifying and vaguely illuminating illustrations. Opportunities for this pastime were usually afforded when the doctor was away attending some convention or other and Mrs. Winston was out of the house. We speculated gravely, as children do.

"But how do *They* get there?"

"It's something that just happens—when you're married."

"Not always," contributed the better informed Bella. "I

know that Winnie" (a discharged servant of the Winstons) "had one. I heard her ask Daddy to 'help her out.' What do you suppose she meant?"

"What did he say?" I hoped that the answer would shed some light on the subject.

"Oh, something about he wouldn't, that it was crim'nal, that she must go through with it. She left after that. Remember I told you I saw her, once, when I went to Somerset to visit Aunt May. She had it in her arms then. Of course, no one knew I had heard anything. I was outside the office window. They forgot to shut it."

"It must be more than just kissing," I pondered deeply.

"Oh, yes!"

Bella was sage. And here she revealed to me certain osculatory episodes in the life of her cousin Anna, older than Bella by some seven years, who lived near by—incidents in which various Harvard students had played the aggressive roles.

"So it can't be that!" we decided. But for some time we marked down poor Anna as our prey, and watched her warily and in secret. When she showed no signs of change we gave it up. The physical distortion prefacing the miracle of birth had not escaped our sharp eyes, nor does it the eyes of most children. With the fierce little-girl modesty which goes hand in hand with physical curiosity, Bella and I would blush and avert our eyes quickly, nudging one another. Afterwards we would whisper about it together.

What a pity it is that the child mind cannot be taught to think of this mystery as something very beautiful. But I do not think that the little understanding can ever grasp beauty beyond what, obviously, is ugliness personified. And these half-guessed answers to the shrouded questions centering around the facts of birth bring only the whisper and the

giggle and hopeless flounderings in the mud of perverted speculation.

I set it down as my firm belief that the clean-minded child is a rarity.

The red-headed boy as abruptly left my life as he entered it. At the end of the term he departed from us, whether by his intention or by parental design I was never destined to know, and I fell back on girls of my own age for companionship and instruction. Bella had long since gone other ways, for between fourteen and seventeen a gulf is fixed which, between seven and ten, is practically non-existent. She wore her hair up, her skirts down and her heels high; she had callers, and she refused to discuss "things" with me, having entered into that curious period of what passes for innocence long after ignorance has been destroyed. So for a time, bitterly resenting this disloyalty, I played with the other children and even made certain experiments which seemed to me, even as I made them, more ludicrous than exciting. The boy partners of these hayloft orgies were younger than the other girls and myself, subsidized brothers for the most part! The difference in age was fortunate, and I must say for the youths that they complied with the feminine requests more in a spirit of bravado than in any other. And by the time I had reached fifteen the encounters had wholly ceased.

I recall the twelve months between fifteen and sixteen as a particularly charming period, in which I almost returned to a state resembling grace. I became suddenly friends with Bella again, on another basis, Bella being engaged to be married and approachable in a thoroughly nice way. I went out a little with mother, I enjoyed a week in Boston during Christmas vacation, spent with my father's sister, Alice, and including one matinée, several musicales,

and many visits to the shops. At home, I studied hard and made progress flattering to my teachers. I had lost all interest in boys and in medical books. Looking back on this period it appears one of rest, of storing up of energy, a fallow time, a good time. I deeply repented my excursions into forbidden fields, thought of them with horror and as little as possible. I felt young-ladyish and understood Bella at seventeen, when approached by me on subjects she had long since left behind her, consciously and with relief. To father's ever-increasing joy, I was now a member of the church and became, after my confirmation, acutely religious in an almost physical way, as many girls do. I had a pretty little voice and employed it in God's praise in the choir. I even played the organ in church when the regular organist, a lady of uncertain health, was absent. I was very like a flower that, having been forced into a premature semblance of bloom, opens its petals tentatively deceived by soft, spring-like airs, but closes them again, suddenly, at the realization that winter is not over and spring not yet come, and slumbers a little while, remembering the abortive debut but faintly—yet still remembering. It was in such a state of mind and body that I met Harcourt Allan.

Harcourt was twenty-one. An illness had delayed his studies and interrupted his sophomore year in Harvard. He came to us, therefore, for several months, in order to take the tutoring necessary to his re-entry in his class in the fall. I recall well enough the evening I first saw him, in the dining-room, surrounded by negligible boys.

I met his dark eyes with indifference, but was almost instantly, strongly, and rather disagreeably stirred by the look that flashed into them. I could feel that look, it was a tangible thing. I thought then, and the intervening years have given me no reason to change my opinion, that he

was the handsomest human creature I had ever seen. He was very dark, with a slight wave in his thick unruly hair, and he was built like a young Greek god. He was by no means exceptionally tall, but he carried himself nobly, and his physical perfection was apparent despite the concealing ugliness of modern male attire—meticulous attire, by the way, for Harcourt was something of a dandy. He had the whitest teeth, and a mouth too beautiful for a man. For the rest, his coloring was clear olive, ruddy under the high cheek bones and with a dash of scarlet in the molded lips, and he had straight, black brows that drew together as he looked at me. And finally, he had very fine hands. I have always loved hands. I think that all my disasters have come from hands, physical hands, in a literal sense. There were Harcourt's young hands, the subtle hands of Sumner Dale, the clever, ineffectual hands that I filled with shame and destruction, to which I taught the unholy lessons hidden in the touch of my smooth skin; the cruel old-ivory hands of the thing I killed, and my own hands that killed it—and finally, as if they had been the gift of an ambiguous fairy at a terrible christening, the dearest hands of all, to the memory of which I am now unwillingly dedicated, the hands that thrust me into outer darkness.

After evensong, a little prayer and hymn service, always held before the evening study period, Father formally introduced me to Harcourt Allan. The moment seemed commonplace enough.

"Daughter, our new pupil; Mr. Allan—my little girl, Jane."

Once more the burning, black look, with the glint of boy-deviltry, charming and unfamiliar, back of it, swept me from head to foot. I was conscious of the hole in my stocking, concealed by my shoes, conscious that I was wearing a "let

down" dress, conscious of—myself, in short. I gave him five limp little fingers, and he took them into a firm pressure. We spoke, said something, I have forgotten what.

How the thing started, if ever there was a starting-point, I do not know. By this time I was allowed to play tennis with the pupils, provided they asked me, during the seasonable terms. A number of boys stayed, or came, for a summer session; Harcourt was one of these. He came to us just as April was swelling the buds with her tender breath, as gray New England stirred in her austere sleep and made as if to fling her somber, puritanic garments to the four winds. And all through that summer he remained.

He was the only son of very wealthy people, in New York. His father's name was one to conjure with in financial circles, his mother a force in society. He was magnetic, pampered, shallow, vain, easily led and yet a leader. At one-and-twenty he was far from ignorant of women. He talked of Life and spelled it Woman; hinted darkly to me of "affairs" that had "meant nothing" and in which an actress, a stenographer in his father's office, and a young married woman of his own class were indicated. This was, of course, when our intimacy had, with him, reached the confessional stage. I did not care in the least. I was not jealous of Harcourt. I do not believe I loved him enough to be jealous, nor yet enough to overcome jealousy. It simply was not there to overcome. Jealousy I had never known, of any living thing; envy, yes, but not the darker passion. That came later, and when it did, Harcourt had no part in it.

When I say that I did not love him enough, be assured that I fancied I loved him enough for anything. I knew only that my whole body shook, when I was alone with him, even in a roomful of people, so to speak; that if he entered

a room in which I was, the blood would leave my heart and I would grow almost physically sick with a sort of apprehension, an awareness, exquisite and nerve-racking. Waking and sleeping I heard his voice, a delightful voice, with the little English accent he had affected or acquired during his year at Eton, the voice that managed to utter such daring sentences, each one a caress, hedged about though we were with what we fancied our only danger—authority. My fingers remembered in their very flesh, before they had ever known any contact with them, the indulged curves of the carven mouth, the broad forehead under the fall of rebellious hair. Yet it was not Harcourt whom I loved. It was myself as I thought he saw me, idealized, perfected.

I grew lax in my studies and spent hours dreaming over some book of verse, or before a mirror. At night I would strip and stand before the cheval glass that I had begged mother not to banish to the attic but let me have in my room. She had only consented after I told her that I wanted to see how my skirts hung. She deplored what she called my habit of "putting on clothes every which way." I was certainly careless about clothes in those days. Because, I think, my clothes did not please me. Afterwards a clothes sense came to me. But I was not one of those fiction heroines who could look like a band-box fairy in a cut-down dress of "mother's."

At all events, the cheval glass came to join the iron bed and the chest of drawers, the straight-backed chair and the washstand, and mother made no further demur. I could see myself from the narrow pink feet to the regal red-gold crown of my hair. Surely, I was not the only girl in the world who in the splendors and agonies of first attraction viewed herself thus. I recall that I would bend this way and that, flex my slender waist and lean close, close, to

catch the flicker of the candles I had lit in my strange eyes, to kiss, sometimes, for sheer delight, the bent-bow scarlet lips that laughed back at me, the mirrored cheeks that reddened for conscious pleasure. I knew I was beautiful. I rejoiced in the knowledge.

Then shivering at the caressing touch of a summer wind across my fevered flesh, I would slip into the high-necked nightgown of impenetrable linen that it was my cross to wear, and making a gamin face at the disappearance of so much loveliness, I would run across the room and leap into my bed, hide my face in the pillows and think of Harcourt.

Chapter III

FOR a long time there were no kisses. Ever since the long-ago night of the summer-house and the red-haired boy from Bangor, I had been assiduously watched, and though of late a certain casual, daytime companionship with the pupil-boarders had been permitted, it was always supervised. Insensibly, however, since my confirmation, the guardianship had relaxed and by the middle of summer certain absences of mine were not questioned, or, if inquired into, my explanations were accepted at their face value. Harcourt would arrange to "go to Boston." I would become enamored of a plan to take a solitary walk, covering any mischance by the careless remark that I might "stop to see Bella on my way home."

Bella was now my confidant. Assured that my love for Harcourt and the avowals he had been able to make to me so far practically amounted to a secret engagement, she was more than willing to assist us. Herself pale and languid under the strain of a long engagement she was inclined to be over-romantic and saw in the difficulties that beset my way the true persecutions of innocent lovers.

So with her help Harcourt and I met with fair frequency, and walked together through the woods on the outskirts of our village. Our encounters were attended with that stimulating companion, Fear. We were never certain when we might be detected. The lovely little woods were not much frequented, and yet there was always a chance that others,

like ourselves, might be tempted into them on a sunny afternoon.

Our caresses were snatched defiantly, our embraces breathless and of fleeting duration. I am glad, now, to think that the first meeting of those eager young lips took place in the dappled gold and green of growing things, under an open sky. For the initial attraction between us was of young and earthly urgency, a bond of the healthy senses, gloriously honest, essentially clean. It was not wordy nor subtle nor evasive.

Had it not been for the secrecy surrounding our meetings, the brevity of them, and the restraint placed upon them by circumstances, I doubt if Harcourt would have felt sufficient pressure to urge me to the decisive step. Had it been made easy for him, he would probably have kissed lightly and ridden away. But I was forbidden fruit, just ripening on a high bough, just bending to his eager hand, only to be tossed upward and away from his grasp by hostile winds. I was the daughter of his tutor, an ex-minister, moreover I was the *adopted* daughter, and the romance with which that invested me as with a cloud compelled me to weave marvelous legends as to my real parentage. To sum up, I was a pretty girl, hedged about with the bayonet-bushes of what Harcourt scornfully termed "outworn conventions." Even to an unjaded fancy, restrictions and barriers add piquancy. Besides, as I have said, Harcourt was a pampered person. Little enough had been denied him. As a result, his impatience grew until it reached the towering proportions of what he surely imagined was an authentic *grande passion.*

The deciding factor in our case was mother. One evening as I practised, all unconsciously, the arts of some Eastern dancer before the revealing cheval glass, I was startled to

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hear a step behind me, to feel a cloth object flung, none too gently, about my naked shoulders, and to become aware of my mother's voice, strident with anger. She had thought me in bed, but seeing the flicker of light under the door that separated our rooms had come in to ask me an important question. She never knocked on my door. It had never occurred to her as a parental gesture.

"Jane!"

On examination the cloth object turned out to be my skirt, which I had thrown on a chair.

I struggled out of its enfolding, then drew it about me again, and with my other hand fumbled for my nightgown. I felt that her eyes were averted from me in her own shame at surprising my nudity.

"I—I was only . . . " I stammered.

She looked at me then, met my eyes full and fair. She was shorter than I; I had to look down to meet her regard. There was something so like hate in it that I thought, and knew not whence the thought came, nor from what depths of knowledge:

"She did see me! She's—envious!"

I sensed a flash of cruel triumph, clear and singing, hard as a naked sword, felt my muscles tighten with exultation, and knew throughout my entire body the little laughter of the flesh. I was young, young, and beautiful! I listened to my mother's tirade in detachment, with something like pity for her years, her white hair, the sagging life of face and body, the sallow, flabby skin.

"—posturing like a—" Words failed her. She turned abruptly away, paused at the door, faced me again.

"Your conduct is disgusting. Your father shall hear of this directly. Hereafter I can promise you less freedom than you have been enjoying. I am beginning to think—

well," she ended, coolly, "you are an influence for evil in this house."

The following day I talked with Father. He spoke to me sadly of modesty, the beauty of modesty, the loveliness of clean, holy thoughts. I longed to confess to him, to tell him how love had awakened the sleeping woman in me, that my worship of my own body was a rite, that it was clean, it was holy, it was lovely, since Nature herself was all of these things. But I hadn't the words, nor could I have uttered them had I had the tongues of angels. John Saunders stood to me in the relationship of father, a relationship that precluded any intimate unburdening. The barrier existing between child and parent was up between us; all the love we bore one to the other could not abolish it.

That was the end of my free afternoons, my walks in green woods. Somehow I managed to smuggle a note to Harcourt, blotted and poignant, in which I told him that our meetings had been cut off, and mysteriously added that I was not able to tell him the reason. That was quick fuel to his fire. In a return letter, slipped under my bedroom door at five o'clock in the morning, he implored me to give him a rendezvous that coming night in the little summer-house. He, being a free agent after lesson-hours, would tell my father that he was going to Boston for the night, to stay with friends, as he frequently did. He would ostentatiously go to Boston, but would return secretly by midnight and wait for me in the given spot, all night if need be.

The day passed as a blur. My lessons, my encounters with human beings who were shadows, my meals, my constant awareness of Mother's condemning face, Father's anxious eyes, all meant less than nothing to me. I saw Harcourt at breakfast and at luncheon. No glance passed between us save our first, a challenging look from him, a

quick nod from me. Then our eyes turned elsewhere, so sly were we become.

I waited that night in a veritable fever until after two o'clock. I knew that my parents slept, whatever their dark thoughts of me. I knew that the whole house was silent, slumber-wrapped. I got out of bed, not daring to light so much as a candle stump, dressed myself in a sober school frock of navy blue, flung a concealing cape about my shoulders, pulled a small hat close about my eyes to hide my conspicuous hair, and left the room.

On rubber-soled tennis shoes, as noiselessly as possible, I crept down the black ladder of the creaking stairs. By the front door I stood for a moment, quite still, and literally fought for composure before I drew the bolts. Then I opened the door just wide enough to allow me to slip through, and closed it softly, softly, behind me. Across the dangerous boards of the verandah, down the steps, on to the lawn. There I made a wide, stealthy circuit of the house. Once well in back of it, I ran as lightfooted as any creature of the forest to the summer-house.

There was no moon at that hour, but the stars were astonishingly bright, and the still summer night seemed to hold its scented breath in expectation. The odor of mid-summer flowers hung heavy on the static air.

Harcourt had not failed me. I saw his cigarette glow in the darkness, and forgot to censure him for his carelessness. With a sound, half sob, half sigh, I pushed aside the vines that served as screen, stepped in, and flung myself in his arms.

"I thought you were never coming!"

"I had to wait."

He kissed me. Not as he had kissed me before, with the fleeting, youthful kisses I had loved, but maturely; a deep,

long kiss that drew my strength from me and made my body as weak, as fluid as water, with a warm weakness, strange and compelling as a drug. I clung to him, gasped, and kissed again.

So still the night, so tangible the flower-perfume, so urgent the necessity for caution, so low our two voices, tense under the strain of whispering explanations, that the combination served to whip Harcourt's easily stirred blood into a ferment of desire.

"I love you—I love you," he told me, over and over again. "Jane—you *must* come away with me. Tonight!"

"Where?" I asked, quite simply, my face hidden in his throat, feeling the strong, young life that beat there, knowing nothing else.

"To New York . . . . we can be married."

"But—college?" I somehow managed to ask.

"Damn college!"

I sighed. His lips were on mine once more and under that indescribable pressure, urgent, seeking, unsatisfied, I must have consented. I don't know.

"My family?"

"You can telegraph them—tomorrow—today."

He could not wholly have planned it before we met, but deep in his heart he must have previsioned that some such emergency would arise. I was spared going to the station and facing the agent who knew me and who doubtless would have telephoned at once to Father. In the lane beyond the house Harcourt had a car waiting. He told me briefly that it was there, he had borrowed it from a friend in Boston who had gone on to New York. His intention, he said, had been to drive it back to Boston after meeting me, and leaving it there. Now he proposed that it should carry us

both to New York—and at once. His friend could use it there, he said carelessly.

I did not much care what arrangements he had made or would make. I was too far gone in love; like a person under ether, without will, living for the moment in a state of suspended animation, in a strange world. There were curious noises in my ears, my own blood beating there, I suppose, although I did not then know what it was. There was a soft darkness about my brain, darker than any night, softer than any cloud. My knees shook, but not from fear, my heart was sick, but not with sorrow nor with regret; it was sick with a sickness that was half excitement, half whipped and incomplete emotions, as Harcourt led me from the summer-house across the shadows of the still lawn.

It takes so brief a moment, as we count time, to perform our most decisive actions. In another scant three minutes I had left behind me, without a backward look, the house that had harbored me for sixteen years. . . . A quarter of a century passed before I saw it again.

I do not remember much about the trip to New York. We stopped for food, we stopped for gasoline, we stopped once, in broad noonday, to buy me a longer coat, we halted now and then on lonelier roads for more of those drugging, stimulating kisses.

It was in New London, I think, that we sent the wire home. A mere, bald statement of fact.

Finally we reached New York.

I had never known such fatigue as when that journey ended. Harcourt had also wired his friend, the owner of the car, and an answer awaited him at the Astor. Apparently no difficulties were to be made about the car. The owner, already in New York, would claim it from the garage that he designated. The question now uppermost was where

I should stay until we could be married. Harcourt left me sitting in the lobby, a stranger in a very strange land, half asleep in a great chair, and went to the telephone. Presently he came back. Physical weariness, the strain of long, fast driving, and inner excitement, had made him pale under the olive skin. His eyes were unnaturally bright, his lips resolutely controlled; I had never seen him handsomer.

"It's all right," he told me hurriedly. "Friend of mine is away for a week or two, on Long Island, I got him on the 'phone. You can be perfectly comfortable in his apartment."

We left the Astor, got into the dusty car again, and drove up Broadway to the rooms in the West Forties.

The apartment, above a hat shop, consisted of a living-room, bedroom, and bathroom.

"Try and rest," Harcourt said. "I'll put the car up. Then I'll come back and we'll talk things over."

It was night. We had had something to eat near Larchmont and there was no need to go out for supper. Harcourt turned on the rosy lights in the living-room and took me in his arms. I leaned against him, overpowered by weariness. His kiss reached me from somewhere very far away. He took my cloak from me, lifted me in his arms, carried me to the further room, and laid me on a great couch that served as a bed. There he took the pins from my hat, removed it, loosened my hair, pulled off my shoes, and covered me with a light afghan.

"Sleep now," he commanded, and kissed me again.

I must have slept for some time. The night was far advanced when I woke. On the couch beside me was an open box; the shaded light of the lamp nearby showed me its contents—a pink nightgown, sheer and fine, inset with lace; a little kimona of silk that would fold in the compass of a

hand, slippers, a brush and comb, toothbrush, scented soap, an impalpable powder.

Harcourt had thought of everything. I never asked where he procured the nightgown and other garments. Since then I have wondered. At that time it was only part of the fairy tale. Shops were closed at that hour, except all-night drug stores, at which he might have got the comb and soap and brushes. But where could he have procured the clothes?

With the swift, recuperative powers of the 'teens I was wide awake in an instant, not at all tired. I heard Harcourt moving about in the other room, I smelled the pleasant smoke of his cigarette.

I called to him and he came quickly. He had shaved, I saw, and there was more color in his cheeks.

"How do you feel?"

"Wonderful!" I answered, truthfully. "What time is it?"

"Almost three."

He sat down on the couch and fingered his gifts.

"You like these?"

"They're lovely!"

I pushed the long, loose hair from my eyes, turned on my side, and laid my cheek against his hand.

"You're so good to me, Harcourt."

"Not as good as I mean to be."

He had me in his arms again, was leaning over me, almost crushing me with his lithe weight.

"Darling . . . . darling . . . ."

He was hoarse, inarticulate. Half slave, half master. It has since occurred to me that men follow closely one pattern under given circumstances. The catch in the throat, the eyes that look sleepy and yet burn under heavy lids, the avid, seeking mouth and hands. They are all alike, or the majority are.

After a little I stirred.

"You should go."

He held me closer.

"Why? Why? What does it matter? We'll be married so soon. Let me stay, little, darling Jane. Let me stay!"

After all, what did it matter? He stayed. Not because he wanted me any more than I wanted him. I made no sacrifice. There was never a more whole-hearted giving.

The next day, or rather, the afternoon of the same day, Harcourt found me peering curiously at my own face in a handmirror

He came behind me, caught the mirror from my hold, pulled my head back, roughly against him.

"What are you doing?"

"Jealous of the mirror?"

"Of the air you breathe!" he answered.

"I was wondering," I said naïvely, "if I looked any—different!"

We had another day, another night, before they traced and found us. Harcourt's father came first and then mine. If anything could have aroused me from the dream in which I moved and had my being it would have been the sight of my father's face. Since I had known him he had never been a young man, but now he was very, very old.

I need not set down here the arguments, reproaches, recriminations. It all boiled down to this: Harcourt was twenty-one. He might marry whom he liked. I was sixteen and must have a parent's or guardian's consent. Father admitted that circumstances forced him to give me this, much against his will. But married I must be. Harcourt's father did not see things in this conventional light. He was a small man, bull-necked, with a keen little eye and a brutal temper.

"The boy can't marry," he said abruptly. "I wish him to finish his college course. He is a damned young scoundrel —and a double damned young fool as well. As for this little lady—" His eyes measured me, I knew that he by no means considered me, pictorially, as Innocence Betrayed—"I am certain she knew what she was about. Do you realize that the besotted whelp hasn't one red cent except what I am pleased to give him?" he demanded, turning full on me.

"Yes."

Oh, but I was still in the dream. Nothing mattered but the strength of the arms I knew, the magic of the beautiful body of my lover, the enchantment of his kisses, the reading together of this new book of life. He was no tyro, for all his youth, I, for all mine, no laggard pupil.

"If he doesn't marry her," my father said, "it means abduction."

"You'd make a scandal of it?" asked the other parent, quite quietly but chewing savagely on a ragged, unlit cigar and turning on my father as he spoke, much as a bull dog turns on some slender, beaten deer-hound.

Even I listened breathlessly for the answer. I knew Father to be a shrinker from publicity, a man whose linen was spotlessly clean, but who, if by chance it had been soiled, would have washed it behind barred doors. Or so I thought. His answer was a revelation. I knew he would sacrifice my good name and his own for what he would think of as my eventual good, the whitewashing of my "honesty."

"I would," he said steadily.

He sat in a great armchair, his hands lax between his knees, his face the face of one who has seen a vision of his own hideous end, a gray face, with lustreless eyes and pinched

lines about the nostrils, nostrils which quivered a little and gave the only sign of life when he was silent.

I was still in my dream.

Here Harcourt spoke, passionately and at length. The enchantment held him too. He had never questioned that we would marry. Grant him that. And he was frantic with fear. I was a lovely thing in those days, although not as lovely as I have been since. But I had then what I never possessed again, freshness and an untaught wildness of passion. Any man with blood in his veins would have battled to hold me, to fasten me to him by any tie that might serve to hold.

"Abduction. It would kill his mother. Very well," said Mr. Allan. "Let them marry—at once. I shall continue Harcourt's allowance. It should be ample. I shall make a place for him in my office although I doubt if he is of much use to me. And if the girl proves a good wife to him, I don't say that I won't do better. But no promises, mind. She'll have to prove it first."

It was over. We had won. I flung myself on Father, to laugh, to cry, to kiss and clasp him. But he loosened my arms and rose from his chair.

"We can go now for the license," he said. "There should be no trouble. This is Harcourt's residence."

He turned to get his hat. Harcourt and his father were quarreling in low tones in a corner of the room.

"Father—please—I love him so much!"

It was an authentic wail for comprehension, some note in it must have reached him. He came back to me, smoothed my hair with a hand that shook.

"I suppose so, Jane, I suppose so. But you have killed me."

I cried out at that, although there was no rancor in the

statement. It seemed to me monstrously unfair. What had I done? Run off with the man I loved and was now to marry. Why was that so dreadful? What difference could the lack of a ceremony make—just for a few days? My Beloved was mine and I was his. Surely that was as binding as any priest or judge could make it?

The legalities were attended to, Mr. Allan offered no difficulties. Father gave his consent, and Harcourt and I were married, without any of the trappings, by a justice of the peace. A few mumbled words, a question or two and it was over.

We returned to the little apartment that had sheltered our mating and remained there during the time we looked for a place of our own. Father went back to Boston immediately. From what he managed to say to me I gathered that he would see me whenever he could come to New York, or whenever I needed him, but that Mother had forever washed her hands of me. She kept to this. I never saw her again. I think she was glad that all had come about as it did. She had Father to herself again after sixteen years of reluctant sharing. And she had him as a certain type of woman most loves her man—needing her and broken.

My clothes were packed and forwarded to me, but by the time they came Harcourt had given me my trousseau. He had excellent taste; I was well dressed for the first time in my life.

For a time Mrs. Allan refused to see me, but Harcourt went to her every day and eventually persuaded her to acknowledge me. At her request I saw her alone the first time. She was a frail creature, a semi-invalid, still with the great beauty that she had given her son. She was always kind to me, after that meeting, but we never liked each other. I thought her petulant and whimsical, and in my

abounding health I fancied her a hypochondriac. I was wrong. She was a sick woman, gallant under great suffering, cloaking her pain under the attitude of a petted and spoiled child.

Of course, as all mothers of sons are, she was jealous of me. And beyond that, jealous of my youth, and of an appearance not eaten into by a corroding disease.

Harcourt was given five hundred dollars a month by his father, his salary totaled twenty dollars a week, and he had commissions. The office was a brokerage concern in which Harcourt did well enough. He had many friends, many introductions, and a winning personality. We lived like little lords and we were always in debt; and never caring. We soon found an apartment that pleased us, we had a maid. I was a good cook, thanks to poor mother, and would have enjoyed playing about the toy-like kitchen, concocting savory viands. But Harcourt did not like to come home and find me redolent of broiling meats or dishwater. He wanted to see me dressed in some frock he fancied, fresh from a bath, waiting for him at the door. Then dinner, and after dinner a play or a dance somewhere. He wished always to exhibit me to his friends. He had the manner of a proud child with a marvelous new toy, a toy that had no duplicate and which all the other children must envy and in vain.

For months he was charming to me. He really loved me, in his fashion, a fashion not wholly mature. I adored him in mine. Between us the passion that had driven us together was as fresh as it had been at first. I have known other passions since that time, passions of the body that were as subtle as serpents, cloying as musk, heady as wine, refinements of passion, as such are cynically called, masking a gross brutality of desire under banners of silk embroidered with strange devices. I have known the sick passion of

jealousy, the terrible passion of unfulfillment, the ultimate passion of the trinity of mind, soul and body, than which no holier thing exists. And I have known, finally, the scarlet and black lust to kill. But this first passion was not as any of these. It was sweet as spring water, hot as clean fire. I reverence it, although there was no rock for it to build on, no foundation save the shifting sands of the senses, with nothing in it that could last, that would not inevitably be consumed, down to the eventual ashes. But I reverence it, and think now that I had moments then with my young husband of utter and unthinking happiness, before my mind woke to harry and torture me with analysis, moments that were dearer than anything I have known before or since.

Chapter IV

THE first few months after our marriage I lived in a world of discovery. I had my first experience of being manicured by a professional, I learned to regard with equanimity what is now as much a part of my toilet as the mere combing of my hair—a marcel wave. I learned the uses of powder, but not as yet of rouge—my coloring was too youthfully brilliant to need adventitious aids—and I soon grew accustomed to high heels and low necks. We went out a great deal at night, and I met what Harcourt called his "crowd." The men were those he had known during his brief college career, either older than himself and safely graduated, or still struggling with the hydra-headed creature of learning, or others, like himself, who had gracefully quitted the institution of education—from choice or by the direction of an harassed faculty. A few were acquaintances from all over the country who had migrated eventually to New York. The majority were bachelors. I, just turning seventeen two months after I was married, became an official chaperon of many a girl much older and infinitely wiser than myself. Mrs. Grundy wears, occasionally, fantastic disguises! We used to go to many dancing places. For one, I recall Reisenweber's—or was that later?—and the larger, gayer hotels. I remember luncheons all over town, tea at the Plaza. It was all very new to me and I loved it.

Until I married I had never tasted an intoxicant. Soon

I learned not to make faces and drink water hastily as if a cocktail were medicine. Whiskey I never learned to like, champagne and light, pretty wines attracted me, slow gin and pousse cafés fascinated me by their coloring, liqueurs I really rather fancied; there was so little of them in delightful miniature glasses, and they were smooth and pungent and of a fiery sweetness. A very small amount of anything to drink went to my head, not disagreeably; it merely made me more talkative and brought the blood to my cheeks. Harcourt liked me to drink a little. I think he feared I was at a disadvantage among girls and women who had seen the world as I had never viewed it, who had been "brought up" by governesses, "finished" at fashionable boarding-schools, and "brought out" at Sherry's or Delmonico's, the Plaza or the St. Regis, to the blare of newspaper trumpets.

As I look back on the women I see that they were all what is technically known as "nice." It was not until much later that I met the obvious, advertised, or hinted-at other kind. As I compare the "nice" women and the ones that were "not nice," I find a certain loose, easy kindliness in the *tabu* ladies that was lacking in the girls I met through my husband. The latter were all man-stalkers, "object matrimony." They appraised one another skillfully and coolly as became rival Dianas, and were at their best in a crowd—witty, hard, and approachable to a certain extent. They invited familiarity from men, then, as soon as it was obtained, repulsed it with outraged horror. Their motto was "Something for Nothing," and they were often daring in a sly fashion, without, however, quite over-stepping the bounds. They always had a planned retreat, an intellectual alibi.

I hear much criticism now of the present-day girl. While

my life, in the nature of it, has not brought me in frequent contact with so-called sheltered girls, not since my years with Harcourt, I am still able to observe them from a distance, through the glass of the theatre, of fiction, of the newspapers and even the modern philosophers. To my mind the girl of today is not the source of danger that the girl of, say, fifteen years ago was. That girl was furtive, she cheated, she lied. She was altogether underhanded. The current specimen is at least honest, in one sense. She has her eyes open, she opens yours. She makes no bones about it and she is generally nobody's fool. I rather think she is the more wholesome of the two. If she follows the fashion, it is not said that she created it. Of course there is this to be said on the side of yesterday's youngster; she did not have the liberty that the present ubiquitous little creature has; she had to take what is now freely given or compelled.

I cannot remember many of the companions of my playtime. They are a general blur to me; now and then one or two will emerge from the background as I mentally review their passing shadows. Slim, well-dressed, with hard eyes and soft ways—cats, for the most part.

I was not witty, nor daring, and did not seem to make friends among them. In a group I was inclined to be silent. Harcourt, who soon tired, he said, of "chatty" women, and approved this quality, told me it was always a relief to turn to me, sitting quite still, not restless, not talkative, rather like a spectator at a play. He was frankly proud of my appearance, said I made the rest look shoddy, of a pattern. He may have had a slight misgiving lest I seem provincial, with my extreme youth and my lack of social experience, but if he had, it soon faded. I was decorative, I made no mistakes; when in doubt I held my tongue, neither fidgeted

nor fluttered, and if I contributed in no way to the rather noisy entertainment of our parties I was no hindrance. And that was that.

The men I can recall better. For instance, one friend of Harcourt's, rather a good friend, Billy——Billy Wynne, I think his name was. I remember him because one night at a studio party he drank over-much and tried to make love to me during a dance. He blew his hot breath in my face, he said a number of things, attempted to do others. I was not sure how to cope with him, I had not yet learned to laugh at or to parry license. There ensued an ugly little scene which ended in Harcourt's knocking Wynne down, bundling me into my wraps, and taking me home.

At home I tried to explain.

"The man's a complete rotter," said Harcourt briefly. "Has a bad reputation. He's keeping a woman now, somewhere up town. He's poisonous."

I wondered ingenuously why, if such was the type of Mr. Wynne, my husband permitted me to be exposed to the virulence of his particular poison. I asked as much, not having learned better.

"But if he's like that," said I, "why do you go with him, and why do you take me with you?"

Harcourt, nervously lighting matches that went out and burned his fingers, swore savagely, then said, with irritation:

"Go with him! What an expression! Don't be idiotic, Jane. Everyone knows Wynne, he is received everywhere."

I said nothing, but he seemed to sense that his explanation was unsatisfactory, and presently burst out, fretfully, in a sort of counter-attack:

"As to that, Wynne is really a fairly decent chap around decent women. Damn it, Jane, you must have encouraged him or he wouldn't have acted—"

I was terribly hurt.

"I did not, Harcourt Allan," I interrupted with heat and without dignity or diction. "I did no such thing!"

Married or no, I was not yet grown-up. It takes more than marriage to mature a girl.

"How do I know that?"

He was rapidly working himself up into a false ebullience of rage, a passion of jealousy. When the contretemps had occurred, his first instinct or reaction had been pure anger at Wynne for annoying me. Turned now in my direction, he sought for food to feed his new emotions.

"You don't seem to flirt," he said slowly, as if weighing me in the balance. I broke in indignantly:

"Don't *seem* to! You know perfectly well I never do!"

While we were talking I had partially undressed and now sat before the dressing-table brushing my hair. I caught back the waves of it with the brush and turned on him so, looking at him over a bare shoulder. On that shoulder was the mark Wynne had set upon it, at the very moment of Harcourt's interference. I saw my husband's eyes find it now and hastily released my hair, sweeping it forward, hiding the scar.

It would seem that Harcourt had not seen in the studio exactly what Wynne's final offense had been. Now he rose and pulling my hair ungently aside, looked at the small, red mark.

"So that's what he did. Damn him!"

"You're hurting me," I complained, trying to pull away from under his hand.

"I'd like to," he said with primal simplicity. "After all, it's no wonder you set men mad, Jane, with that red mop of yours and those eyes."

He kissed me, brutally enough, and added:

"But never let me catch you. . . . If I thought you tried anything behind my back. . . . I wonder. . . . I wonder. . . ."

Harcourt had been drinking too. He was not drunk, as we understand such things, neither was he wholly sober. Not quite himself. He continued to wonder, probably, in silence while with unsteady hands and a sickness of disgust and shame at my heart and throat I went on brushing my hair, bringing the gloss to the waves and tendrils, braiding it finally in the single thick plait that reached to my hips and broke there into rough, curly ends.

He watched me, then said, suddenly, as if finishing aloud some thought that was working in him:

"By God, you were easy enough when—"

I flung down the brush with a crash on the table. A dreadful anger possessed me. I hadn't known before that it was in me. It was my first warning, then ignored as such, of the dormant animal which slept within my soul, and which, prodded once too often, showed dangerous signs of activity, the animal that later made its kill.

I hardly know what I said; I hardly knew then. It all ended in my tears and in Harcourt on his knees beside me.

"Little Jane, I'm sorry. I was a beast. Forgive me? I didn't mean it."

Then I learned another lesson, the lesson of reconciliation, a passion new to us both, in which we held one another close, fearful because loss had threatened, glad to comfort one another.

Yet in one sense we had lost each other beyond recovery. The bloom was off. Love is a terribly fragile thing to seem so strong.

That began it. After that he watched me always, and I grew awkward and distrait, nervously feeling his eyes on

me. He took me out less for a time, then chafed under the self-imposed exile. He was a gregarious soul. He loved people, lights, music, laughter and the inconsequent hum of many voices.

So, with a warning, veiled but discernible, he once more took me among his kind, and I went knowing myself never free from his jealousy and finding that the bloom had worn off the pleasure-parties as well. We were no longer Adam and Eve in a cheerfully populated Eden, innocent and merry. The serpent had entered, Adam was on his guard, Eve learned to be artificial.

At this time I met the junior partner in old Mr. Allan's brokerage office, Mr. Richards, who had been in Europe since our marriage and had just returned. At his house I was introduced to Jack Evans, a lawyer in the firm that Mr. Allan and his associates employed. Evans was about forty-five, lean and haggard, with a nice smile and slow, insinuating ways. He was a lazy man, a dilettante in all the arts, including the art of living, with an excellent if superficial mind; he was well-read, had a catholic taste in literature, and a real love for it. We began to meet frequently, and I found I could entertain myself while with him by talking of things that were apparently out of the scheme of life in Harcourt's narrow set. Books, classic and modern, books of poetry, philosophy, travel, which Father had taught me to love and enjoy intelligently.

Evans used to call me "child-wife" and would feign to marvel, with mock solemnity, at my long skirts. I wore my first trains at that time and was extremely proud of them. As a matter of fact, judged by present-day standards, I did not look exceptionally youthful. I appeared fully twenty-five, not seventeen. As styles altered, and figures and coiffures with them, I looked younger as I grew older,

and at twenty-five might easily have passed for seventeen. At seventeen I was tall in my very high heels, and as I was just rounding out, availed myself of dressmakers' aids to a "fuller" figure, for in those days women with the general structural lines of a slat were not admired. Also I wore my hair in intricate puffs, coils and swirls, which gave me additional height, and I confined my waist to a greater extent than, thank Heaven, is now considered expedient.

A general appearance of dignity was supplemented by my usual silence and the fact that I rarely laughed.

"Child-wife," Mr. Evans said to me once, "you are not getting the most out of this, our brief, earthly span."

I was now accustomed to his extravagant style of address and answered, or rather inquired, indifferently:

"Why not?"

We were at a dancing-party, given I think, in the Knickerbocker, an after-theatre affair. The turkey trot was coming into favor, and I watched Harcourt revolve and joggle about the room with a little brunette. Obviously, he was flirting with her, but I knew that if I spoke to him about this afterwards, he would only laugh at me in a contented manner for a "dear little idiot" and let it go at that. Things didn't work both ways in marriage, I pondered for the hundredth time and with renewed astonishment. But Mr. Evans had been answering my question for some time and I had lost most of his remarks.

"—this silly little crowd . . . dancing and drinking. . . . You should get an occupation," he was saying, "study, read. . . ."

"Harcourt doesn't like to read," I said, transferring my attention from the floor to my partner.

"What of that? You are alone almost all day. What do you do?"

I considered this. What *did* I do?

"Oh, fuss about the kitchen a little, cook sometimes, just for fun. And sew. I can sew very well," I explained, as I saw a gleam of merriment come into his sleepy gray eyes.

"Dolls' housekeeping," he murmured.

I ignored this.

"I walk in the Park, or take a hansom. Sometimes I go to the matinée."

"A very full life," he observed gravely.

I was a little piqued. When I looked up from a deliberately long survey of the dancers, gyrating to the strains of "Alexander's Rag Time Band," I found that my companion was looking at me steadily, with a perceptible difference, and a curious glow in his eyes.

"No. No. Mea culpa! I was wrong. You are a lovely thing, child-wife," he said, "and books are not for those little hands or studies for that little head. You are not in your setting here, however, in this machine-made town of ours. You should have yachts to carry you like white horses over blue roads, you should have old palaces in Italy, with tall hounds to walk by your side on green terraces where poplars stand, and twisted dark cedars bend over little crystal pools. And you should always wear long straight gowns of dull blue or green, girdled in silver, or in red-gold to match your hair, and in your hair you should wear a dagger with a hilt all of jewels, and you should have ropes and ropes of pearls."

I started from a revery in which I was planning to have just such a gown as he described made for me and at once. I liked the sound of it. Velvet, I thought, no, some thinner, more yielding stuff. . . . Pearls. . . . Though I had seen

many pearls since I had come to New York, my cupidity for them while I dreamed of other things had fallen asleep. Now it stirred a little in its sleep. Harcourt had given me some jewelry, several rings, a brooch or two, a bracelet and a watch, and I thought them splended beyond comparison, I who had never possessed a jewel until my marriage. Now I realized dimly that in the locked coffers of the world were gems such as I had never seen or imagined, great, colored stones, stones that would shine on my breast, my arms, my hands, and glow like stars in my hair, all to lend me something of their eternal, unchanging beauty.

My eyes must have mirrored something of my thoughts; the man sitting quietly beside me drew a sudden, audible breath.

"I wish I could give you all these things," he said.

I knew he should not have said it. I knew that he had a wife somewhere in the background—one never saw her—and I knew that I had Harcourt, even now making his way toward our table from the other side of the close, crowded room, his face a little flushed with—was it dancing?

He claimed me for the dance now starting. In our little apartment, to the melodies of the phonograph, my new toy, he had taught me the art and had no reason to be ashamed of his pupil. So we drifted away from Mr. Evans, who stood watching us with an odd mixture of relief and regret in his expression, an unlighted cigarette between his fingers. Harcourt said:

"What were you and old Jack talking about so earnestly?"

He spoke lightly enough, but I suddenly resented his prying into my very thoughts, the littlest word spoken out of his hearing.

For the first time I lied to him.

"Nothing, really. Books mostly."

Harcourt did not pursue the subject. He was not seriously interested. Jack Evans seemed to him as old as the very hills, and as weary as they and their Giaconda.

As I have said, we were living far beyond our income and saving nothing at all. What was the use, Harcourt demanded of the world at large; when the governor died, he would come in for the mint and a little over. Meantime the five hundred dollars that constituted his allowance paid for rent, food and some of our clothes, the salary furnished cigarettes, the occasional commissions were extra windfalls. Why worry? He had been several times to his father for money when bills were unduly pressing, and after the inevitable argument it was always forthcoming.

Every Sunday night we dined with the Allans in the gloomy old house on Madison Avenue. How glad I was that they had never urged us to live with them! Occasionally Mr. Allan came to dinner with us, and I tried very hard to please him, helping in the kitchen myself, preparing things Harcourt told me his father particularly fancied. Afterwards we would play three-handed bridge, or have Jack Evans in to make a fourth. Mrs. Allan never came. She was always ailing and always at some health resort or other. She was kind, as I have said, and he was wary. He had not made up his mind about me; if he liked me, it was against his will and better judgment.

Father I had not seen since the day I was married. He wrote me once a week, loving and wise letters, and I answered. He never mentioned Mother.

Harcourt and I had been married for a little over a year when I began to feel ill. It went on for a little while, a strange discomfort, a general physical disruption, a reluctance to get out of bed in the morning, a heavy and oppressive fatigue. Finally, suspecting my condition, as I was

a human being and not a young wife in a book, I went to a doctor of Mrs. Allan's, saying nothing to Harcourt, from some instinct of concealment which should have warned me.

The doctor was very kind. He congratulated me and gave me sound advice. I went home in a daze.

I was not astonished, as I had feared this, but now that I knew definitely, I was at sea.

Frankly, I was frightened. The pictures in the medical books Bella and I had filched from Dr. Winston's office came back to me in all their crude force. I saw again the unshapely women Bella and I had pointed out to one another and laughed over in secret. I lay down on my bed and cried. After a little I began to be happier. I knew next to nothing about babies, they had never appealed to me, but I began to think of them in poetic terms, picturing fat, pink, dimpled cherubs, very charming to possess. I wondered what Harcourt would think, always with that little uncertainty at the back of my mind. And when he came home I was standing by the door mirror, anxiously searching for some as yet non-existent change in my figure.

I turned as he entered; he saw my tear-stained face.

"What's the matter?"

I told him, not shyly, but fully and frankly, and waited for the conventional word of tenderness that I felt must follow. It did not come. Harcourt had, then at least, no urge toward self-perpetuation.

"A hell of a thing!" he muttered, very black about the brows.

I saw he was really upset. I thought, or wished to think, it was fear for me, and my own fear left me as I reassured him.

"It's all right. Really, I'm not frightened, Harcourt, I'll be fine. The doctor said I was in good condition, and I am

so young and strong that it will help me. Millions of women have them every day. Don't worry, dearest." As he still said nothing, but sat on the chair into which he had flung himself, staring at the floor, "Harcourt—won't it be rather sweet to have a baby of our own?"

"Yes, I *don't* think," he answered with simplicity.

I sat down near him.

"You're not pleased?"

"Don't be a fool. There's plenty of time for that sort of thing. Good Lord, at this rate you could be a grandmother at thirty-five. I can't stick it. You'll lose your figure—we'll have to stay at home—you'll be ill all the time. And as for afterwards! My God, we can hardly live as it is, without a new expense!"

I do not say that I longed to have the baby; that would not be true. But in proportion to Harcourt's disgust my opposition to his attitude grew. We argued the whole night through. At the end of the argument I weakly agreed to go to a doctor of whom Harcourt had heard. Not one of the Allans'. A theatrical doctor, a clever, unscrupulous man.

I went. I had a very bad time and was sick for some weeks, and utterly miserable. Not only in my bodily being. I felt that I had done something very dreadful against natural laws. Harcourt was devotion itself, so relieved that he was all tenderness. For a time I was half stupid under a weight of unordered thoughts. When I was well again and my mind cleared, I wrote down a very black mark against my husband. I realized dimly that, while I had not passionately wanted the baby as many women do, I would shortly have adjusted myself to the thought of its coming, once the fear that was really the main obstacle to happiness was removed. And that I should have come through fear and pain to happiness and usefulness. Har-

court . . . he had robbed me . . . I never forgave him. I wonder often if *that* would have made the degree of difference—a child of my own? Again I am forced to the conclusion that it would not—for long.

Somehow, probably through Mrs. Allan's friendly doctor, Mr. Allan heard of my "expectation," as he quaintly called it. He had been away for some time, and on returning sent for Harcourt to come to the private office. I think Harcourt then saw that he had blundered from a worldly point of view. His father was inordinately pleased, offered us more money at once, promised to defray all expenses of the confinement. Harcourt had not thought of that. I fancy he awkwardly explained that I had had an accident. . . . etc. At length his father dragged the sordid truth from him. He was disgusted and enraged, felt himself cheated. He and Harcourt came to bitter words. In a sort of blind terror of probable results, including the cutting-off of allowances and other serious matters, Harcourt managed to lay the blame on me, attributing the "accident" to my youth and fear and inexperience.

Mr. Allan left the office and came at once to see me. What he said was terrible. He called me every name from demi-woman to murderess. I felt the latter accusation was, in a measure, true, but I tried to explain. He would not hear me. It was a pitiful business, husband and wife each blaming the other to the father of one of them.

When Harcourt came home I was alone and accused him of hiding behind my skirts. This he denied and we had a really degrading scene. It ended in kisses. It always ended in kisses, more kisses, growing scenes. I was still weak from my illness and prone to tears on any provocation, large or slight. Harcourt flung himself about, muttered that he had married a watering-can. I grew hysterical. The

theatrical doctor, suave and smiling, was called in, Harcourt subdued, and I sent to bed with a sleeping draught. When I woke, more reconciliations were in order.

The subject was dropped for a time. Our allowance continued, after threats, but was not of course augmented. We were deeply in debt. The theatrical doctor came high, his was a dangerous branch of business. Harcourt then approached me with the suggestion that I "really" have a baby for the good of all concerned. He generously admitted that, after all, it might amuse me and would appease "the old man!" I have never had a suggestion revolt me as much as that one, and I have since had many suggestions made to me. But they were all concerned with the disposal and sale of my own body, and another soul did not enter into them. I flatly repudiated the idea. Harcourt could not assume parenthood merely to gratify his father and increase his own allowance. That much was clear to me. There are some depths to which no woman will sink. There is caste in everything.

Harcourt was furious with me. It was the beginning of the end.

Chapter V

NOT long afterward I learned that Mr. Allan was giving Harcourt more money. It was not added to the allowance but was put in a separate account. I was at a loss to understand this sudden generosity, as I knew that his attitude toward me, far from changing for the better, had settled into one of distrust and dislike, and this increase in benevolence, following closely on his threat to completely cut us off, puzzled and worried me. A year or so previous I would doubtless have neither questioned nor worried, merely accepted the new régime with a light-hearted gratitude. Now I was growing and my brain along with me. Mr. Allan seemed to encourage Harcourt to indulge in the wildest expenditures, the most lavish hospitality. I am sure now what his reasoning was—that the more rope he gave Harcourt the sooner Harcourt's wife would hang herself. He even accompanied us on many occasions and went with us to all "first nights," sitting back in the box with the air of a man watching more than mimic action on a stage. He teased me quite genially about the men who complimented me in his hearing, even complimented me himself, and more than once told Harcourt with a heavy, bovine playfulness that he had better "watch out." I was growing "too good-looking."

When I spoke to Harcourt about his father's change of face, he merely answered carelessly that it was his way of showing he regretted the recent "misunderstanding." That Harcourt believed this explanation I have no doubt.

It was Mr. Allan who introduced us to the Mortons, the widowed father and his daughter. Florence Morton was then about twenty, a pretty, wholesome girl, breezy and unassuming. She had been educated in a well-known school on the Hudson, had been one of a party of pupils who "did" Europe with a teacher. She was quite simple and I rather liked her. The Mortons were enormously wealthy, and had come to New York with the plain object of frivoling. How Mr. Allan came to know them I have forgotten. I judge he had business dealings with James Morton. At all events he constituted himself their guide, philosopher and friend, entertained them often, and induced me to chaperon Florence on some of our staider parties, and to play hostess at his own house, as Mrs. Allan was, as usual, away from home.

Florence seemed to admire Harcourt very much. She was no flirt, at least not with married men, but it was obvious that she liked him. I teased him about it, good-naturedly, and he only laughed. But I suppose he was flattered.

Mr. Allan had somehow the air of a man who knows that somewhere a fuse has been laid and who has a match. But whatever his plans concerning these combustible objects, the fuse was not eventually lighted by him.

The person who officiated in this capacity was known to her friends as Fancy. She was an actress, not a very good one in any sense of the word, a dazzling blonde, small and expensive, a beautifully bound edition of the Compleat Minx, as I heard a man call her once. I had seen her on the stage and met her later at a large party in the Astor ballroom. At the time I noticed that when Harcourt and I were presented to her, by our hostess, a new acquaintance, and in a group, Harcourt seemed to know her and was a

little embarrassed. It did not impress me. Harcourt knew so many people.

They danced together a number of times that night, though Harcourt did not make the first approach. He was standing with me when she came up and tapped him on the arm with her fan.

"Aren't you going to dance with me?"

Jack Evans appeared at that moment and claimed me, and Harcourt and his self-elected partner were soon lost in the crowd. Later Evans said to me, just before the party broke up:

"Have an eye to the Boy-Husband. He is warming idle hands at an old flame."

I repeated the remark to Harcourt after we reached home. He was taking off his tie, whistling softly, with a careless, satisfied smile on his mouth. I watched him, and it occurred to me that he was putting on weight, which was not as becoming as his former Greek slimness.

"Mean? How do I know? I knew Fancy years ago. Evans is an officious ass, and moreover makes you conspicuous the way he hangs around you—the old fool, old enough to be your father."

I silently admired Harcourt's invariable genius for turning the tables of marital reproaches.

"How well did you know her?" I persisted, more out of curiosity than anything deeper.

He pulled the tie off, crumpled the inoffensive object into unseemly wrinkles, threw it irritably on the dresser.

"Well enough. It's three o'clock in the morning. Stop nagging for heaven's sake and get to bed. One would think you jealous of any woman I look at twice."

He knew that was not so, and my lack of jealousy annoyed

him. He then went to bed in what, in a woman and another generation, would have been classified as a "pet."

Nevertheless, three weeks later, a small party of us went after the theatre to Jack Evans' apartment. There was a good deal to drink. Fancy joined us a little later, and I saw my husband in the course of the evening lay his lips to the hollow of her bare arm, and I heard her say, laughing:

"You haven't forgotten how!"

I was neither jealous nor angry. I was sick. I was sick of parties, of myself, and very sick of Harcourt. For a long time our love relation had been a thing of habit. We no longer ran to meet our passion on feet of reverence, with the open arms, the lovely wildness of youth and unsatiety. It was something accustomed, as food is. It's springtime was no more. I had not realized this although there had been a dullness of discontent in me, until I saw him with his mouth to the white arm of the other woman and knew how little I cared what he did.

I moved out of sight and earshot. Evans followed me. He had seen too.

"Too bad," he said, "I'm sorry, Jane. Harcourt has been drinking too much—he doesn't mean anything—"

It was nice of him to explain, or try to. I appreciated it.

"Was she ever his mistress?" I asked casually.

Evans stared.

"How can you? What a dreadful thing. . . . How do I know? Of course not. Well, yes, she was," he ended simply, as I stood and looked at him, and he knew there was little use in lies. I do not think he was malicious, I am sure he would rather not have told me. "She is years older. It happened his first year in college. He was only a rich, handsome boy."

I nodded.

"I see. He hasn't changed."

Evans stared again.

"You don't care?" he asked increduously.

"No."

I think he was sincerely shocked. He said something, I don't know what. I was reflecting that Fancy was the actress of whom Harcourt had once spoken to me, in tones deeply regretful. She was really exquisitely pretty, although not in her first youth.

When Harcourt and I reached home, he was inclined to play the lover, his senses having been stirred by the little passage between him and the woman, an old stimulant acting on him once more. I was not of his mind and told him so. I did not tell him why. We quarreled. Then I knew the extreme degradation of being forced to a man's will when nothing in me acquiesced. It was the first time, not the last; in a measure, the worst.

After that I did not care about anything at all. I no longer loved Harcourt. The death of that love may seem sudden as it is written. As a matter of fact, it was so gradual a decline as to go almost unnoticed for a long time. I did not love anyone, not even myself. Nothing pleased me. Harcourt could go back to his Fancy, for all I cared, and I suppose he did, or found some other amiable proxy. At all events, he did not much disturb me, left me rather severely alone, in fact. Perhaps he hoped by that method to melt the ice of my indifference.

I see no reason to linger over this part of our life. We had been married something over two years. I was nineteen, Harcourt twenty-three. For five or six months we lived on tolerably friendly terms, summer intervened, we had a vacation in the mountains, returned to town. Harcourt began then to drink noticeably and once more to insist

upon his lapsed "rights." I was as bored as it is possible for any one to be at that age. I had my full share of scenes. Harcourt went to his father. I am sure I don't know what either of them said; no doubt Harcourt received his meed of sympathy. The Mortons came again to New York for the winter season of opera and play, and one night knowing that Harcourt had planned to go out with them and his father, I refused to accompany him and so was home alone with a book when Jack Evans called.

I have since wondered whether he had known that I was alone. He might have met Harcourt at the club, where Harcourt was to meet his father and dine with him before they joined the Mortons at the Metropolitan. Yes, he may have known.

It was after nine when he came in, and I asked him to stay a while, explaining that Harcourt would not be late returning as he had said he would not go to supper after the opera.

A fire burned in our little living-room. Evans had brought me roses, the warmth released their scent, and the room was fragrant and pleasant.

Jack Evans was a charming man in many ways and a good friend, according to his lights, though never over-scrupulous.

He had often made veiled love to me, in impersonal words. Now he abandoned this method.

"Jane . . . what a ridiculous name. Amber, they should call you. Dark amber hair with red sun in it, golden amber eyes."

We had been talking for two hours or more, sitting on the small sofa before the fire. Now he put his arm around me, kissed me.

I was quite passive and not at all amused.

"Don't."

He persisted. I struggled, mainly because I was annoyed and uncomfortable. My hair came down, I was almost bent backward over the sofa. That's how they found us, Harcourt and his father.

Florence Morton had taken it upon herself to feel ill, they had left the opera, Mr. Allan had accompanied Harcourt home for a high-ball and a cigar. Such was the explanation, later.

There was really not much of a scene. The Wynne episode was not repeated. Harcourt refused to "soil his hands" with the elder man. No blow was struck, there were not even over-loud words. Harcourt went to his club to live, his father departed in barely concealed triumph. Evans departed also. I think he was not sorry. In an oblique way I believe he felt he had unwittingly rescued me from an impossible life. Perhaps he had. The thing that most impressed him apparently was the fact that he was one of Mr. Allan's lawyers. That was really ironical and rather funny.

Divorce followed. It was very quiet and not a New York State divorce. If I had wished to, no doubt I could have got one without leaving the city. There was evidence enough, or had been, as I later found. However, I let them arrange things as they wished, and went to a Western state where divorces are easy and quick, and the grounds for them almost any. Harcourt's lawyers, not Evans' firm, of course, were dignified and benevolent. They intimated that, had Harcourt wished, he could have procured the divorce himself and in New York, no less. I had wisdom enough to ignore that. However, the idea was conveyed to me that Harcourt was chivalrous in the extreme in allowing me to assume the role of complainant in the matter.

I was paid a large sum of money in lieu of alimony. Jack Evans invested this for me and I returned from my exile to a room and bath in a small hotel in the theatrical part of the town. I could have retained the apartment, but its memories would have sickened me. My father wrote me a very wonderful and pathetic letter. He offered to come to New York. I replied I did not want to see him. Nor did I. I was in a state of coma.

Of course the worst versions of the affair got about, were carefully disseminated, I presume. The Allan following was strong. Harcourt was looked on as the embodiment of chivalry. I was a light woman, whitewashed by consent of her wronged husband. Men and women whom I knew slightly and whose reputations were a little blurred began to make efforts to be in my company. Others of good report preferred to cut me. My status was thus clearly established.

Jack Evans said, seeing the situation:

"It's a damned shame. But you are well out of that family. Look here, I'm hardly a marrying man, I haven't the means, and I have claims on me, my old people, you know. But I will divorce my wife. She wouldn't mind, she's a nice woman, I hardly know her. She would get the divorce if I asked her, we made an arrangement of that sort some years ago, whichever of us wanted to be free was to say the word. I am not very eligible, I know, but would you consider marrying me if it were fixed up? Or if you don't care about marrying me—would you contemplate any other arrangement?"

I was not particularly offended although I should have been. I liked the man but no more. I looked at him and said:

"You know I wouldn't contemplate anything."

"I'm not rich enough?" he asked with a wry smile.

"I don't love you, Jack."

"Must you?"

"Must I what?"

"Love?"

At twenty! I nearly laughed in his sober face. Of course I must. But never again as carelessly.

I came close to laughing again when in the course of a conversation he happened to tell me that it was his former apartment which Harcourt had borrowed for our official and unofficial honeymoon. I hadn't realized it. I suppose at the time I had asked the name of the owner, but it had not penetrated my consciousness, so deep had I been in my dream. Now it dawned on me that the thing was humorous. I told him so.

A few weeks afterward I went to Europe, and traveled alone, with a determination to enjoy myself. In England I picked up an excellent maid who was out of a position for a time while her former employers traveled elsewhere without a maid. For a year I wandered about France and Italy, made friends, met others, and my reputation assiduously followed me. I was a woman on the outskirts. I had divorced my husband through his kindness, I was a doubtful character. However, I had money and beauty and one or two of the men I encountered seemed quite willing to marry me. I was almost touched by this consideration. But I was done with marriage. I came home to the States, my pictures appeared in the Sunday papers, a letter from father awaited me announcing Mother's death, and I considered asking him to sell the school and come to New York and make his home with me or even to choose his own dwelling-place and take me with him. I had already put pen to paper, almost happy at the prospect, but determined not to be prevailed upon to return to the brown house in the

neglected gardens, from the windows of which I would always be able to see the summer-house and recall the lost rapture, when I was informed that the investments that had been made for me, the brilliant, risky investments, had proved more risk than brilliance, and I was practically without income.

I could not appeal to Mr. Allan. Immediately after our divorce Harcourt had married Florence Morton and was living on Long Island. It was obvious that Florence had consoled him for his wayward wife and had condoned his Fancy, if indeed she had ever known of that episode. Mr. Allan was delighted at the marriage, Florence was nearing her confinement.

That last bit of news made me truly bitter. Why? *Why?* How was I to live? Going home to my father penniless and in the eyes of that little suburb a ruined creature was surely out of the question. I had no talents. I had nothing but beauty and a small singing voice, commonplace enough.

Jack Evans was in despair. He renewed his offers. He wanted to give me money. I was not disconsolate, would not listen to him.

"All right. If you really want to help me, here's how you can do it. Introduce me to some manager. You know lots of them. I want to go on the stage."

He argued. I argued.

"What else have I that is marketable? Who would employ me as a secretary, a governess, even if I were qualified for those posts. I have looks and a tarnished name, neither marketable anywhere on earth except on the stage. So I will take them to that market and see what pay I will get for them."

After a time, he agreed. I met a manager whose name does not signify, and was presently engaged as a chorus

girl in a musical comedy, which rejoiced in the title of *He Lost Her Address.*

The papers have written me down as an actress. As a matter of fact I was on the stage six months, and my acting consisted of wearing several scant but elaborate costumes, in singing unintelligible words to bad music with the other girls, and in speaking one line which is still firmly fixed in my mind; it was "Oh, Mr. Van Rotterdam, where's your high hat?"

I selected as my stage name that of Amber Lee. I am indebted to Jack Evans for the Amber and to a telephone book for the Lee. As Amber Lee I have since been known. Jane Saunders was never known, Jane Allan forgotten.

In those days there were no show-girls, so called, nor were there Midnight Frolics, revues, or Follies in which settings Youth and Beauty might exhibit themselves to advantage. There were merely musical comedies wherein ladies of the chorus took part. I was one of them and shared a long dressing-room with many of my ilk.

I made no friends among them. In fact, I have never made women friends.

I earned very little money, but never had to pay for a meal except breakfast, and because of my figure I was "dressed" by a fashionable dressmaker. In the reverse order of the general run of things I left the company when the run closed and never returned to the stage; for I became a mannequin in the shop which had interested itself in me. Fleurrete et Cie found me the perfect clothes-horse, mannequins were new to New York, a quite recent importation from Paris. I wore clothes well, photographed beautifully, could walk across a room. I was paid a much better salary than with the *He Lost Her Address* company. I liked the hours and work better, and was quite content.

Jack Evans said to me:

"Well, you couldn't stick the stage and you won't stick this long."

He laughed as he spoke and regarded me with what I am prone to think was real affection. We were dining at Sherry's, and he displayed a hothouse strawberry to me on his spoon. "I can't bear to see you do anything but sit on a cushion, sew a fine seam, and all the rest of it."

"A permanent cushion would be uncomfortable," I objected, "cream would make me fat, sewing would be simple, but strawberries do not agree with me."

He watched me eat my melon and then said reflectively:

"Then, as you won't have me, I shall have to find someone else for you."

"He must have a yacht," I decided, "and the terraces you spoke of. Then I shall consider him."

"And love? You once had strong views on love."

"I am weakening," I answered.

Chapter VI

I HAD been a member of the *He Lost Her Address* aggregation of idiocy for six months, a mannequin for two months, and a divorced woman for two years. At times I would look back over my life and marvel impersonally at the girl, Jane Saunders, who once crept down the black stairs of an old house and ran to meet her lover in the shadow of kindly vines. That girl did not seem real, nor did many other memories connected with her. Surely she was not I? In my later life with Harcourt, in my wanderings abroad, my idle weeks in New York, and my struggle for existence, I seemed a wholly different creature, one not yet completely hardened but slowly callousing in all the softer fibers of her nature. I was still a silent person, not easily moved to laughter. These two traits, innate in me, made me stand out among the other girls of my adopted class. I had a number of men friends by now, if one can dignify them by that abused term, men for the most part on the wrong side of thirty or forty, with more or less money and senses partially, if not wholly, jaded. Some of them decided that it would be benevolent or "smart" or both to take upon themselves the burden of my "protection," which, I must say, is a humorous term. I grew wholly insensible to the insult of these offers.

When Jack Evans had first proposed such a step to me I had been too wrapped about with an unnatural indifference to react either in anger or in shame. The first of the later suggestions had made me sick and sorry for days aft-

erwards. I learned to smile at them as I refused them, feeling that my situation exposed me quite naturally to that sort of thing. No man yet attracted me, no bidder was high enough. As far as the moral aspect was concerned, I was blind to it. I considered that some phases of my married life, during the last few months of it, had been as immoral as any I might ever encounter. As for the rest of my life, who would marry a woman of my reputation, one which did not improve with time? That from the moment I had given myself into Harcourt's keeping I had been what is technically known as a good woman and a faithful wife did not seem to be a matter of public belief. I was quite aware of the legend that had gathered about the facts of my divorce. Nothing mattered much except that I was young and lovely and meant to get the most out of life, an oblique most, to be sure, but better than nothing.

At the end of two months at Fleurrete et Cie, during which time I walked across a show-room stage and raised my skirts occasionally but my voice not at all, I had a telephone call from Jack Evans. I now saw him frequently, it was his custom to telephone me every morning, and no premonition startled me as I picked up the instrument.

"I have your man!" he announced, without preliminary.

"Not another manager?" I said, half asleep, and wholly incurious. I had been out the night before and had not got home until early morning.

He laughed.

"If you care to express it so—Listen, Amber. You haven't met him, he is just back from South America. You must have heard of him. Sumner Dale?"

I had heard of him—of his three disastrous marital experiences, his clever mind and debauched body, his

Oriental apartment on lower Fifth Avenue, his strikingly original sin.

"Has he a yacht?"

"Two. And miles of terraces—in California."

"Someone told me," I said, "that he was otherwise—interested."

"You mean Little Eva? That's all off—was, before he went away. Listen, will you go to the theatre with me tonight? We might see the new show that is opening, that one of the Mannheimers. Several of your old cronies are in it. Dale can't be with us there, but has a table at Rector's after theatre and will meet us. We'll dine at Bustanobi's, alone, you and I—maybe for the last time!"

I smiled at that, as I accepted, and the conversation ended. I went to my wardrobe in the fearful little hotel bedroom and looked over my clothes. I had one dress which I thought would do better than any Fleurrete creation, a relic of my stay in Paris. It was a straight blue thing with a girdle of gold tissue, made much after the fashion of the dream-dress in which Jack Evans had once previsioned me. I liked the gown, long and sheath-like, following no lines of prevalent fashion, cut square and high across the neck, a line that women now favor, trying and straight, from which only a young face or throat may rise triumphant.

I wore no hat, although in those days hats were customary for theatre, dinner and supper; I relied on my hair to make its effect. I brushed it smooth and shining and wound it like a turban. I wore no jewels except the amber I now affected, long, clear drops in my ears, and amber-set buckles on my gold slippers. I reddened my lips, dusted powder over my face, and touched the lobes of my ears with the perfume some besotted idiot had given me at thirty dollars an ounce, a curious, clinging perfume, not cloying

yet satanically sweet. I went to meet Jack when he was announced, a little stirred by the thought that I was to encounter a man labelled as "dangerous" in more than one country, and more amused at Jack Evans' persistent if misguided efforts to "look after me." He put it that way. There might be an uglier term for it. It seemed, however, sheer altruism on his part, as he surely cared for me as much as it was in him to care for anyone and the immoral nature of his plans only moved my sense of humor.

At dinner Evans tried again and again to lead the conversation to Dale. I amused myself by sidetracking him. At last in desperation he broke out:

"Listen to me, Amber. This man has seen you once. Last night, no less. You were at some party or other."

"Jack's, for supper—and breakfast."

"Yes. Well, he was there. He was tremendously taken, you understand. He knew no one in your party, and combed the town this morning until he lit on me. It's a big chance. He is educated, clever, has all kinds of money and has the reputation of being exceptionally generous."

"He sounds like a Sultan," I murmured, "or an employer. Will you recommend me—'honest, willing, industrious'?"

"Don't be so cynical!"

He was genuinely shocked. And that was really funny. Compared to my remark I suppose he considered his own sentimental in the extreme.

"Let's not talk about him," said I, suddenly revolted.

Evans sighed and gave me up. We went to the theatre and afterwards I went alone to the dressing-rooms to see some of the girls I knew. They asked me to join a party but I refused, pleading the previous engagement. Curious, they crowded around me, demanded the names of my cavaliers. When I mentioned Evans they shrugged, some

smiled, I had been seen often with him, one inference only was to be drawn. Then I spoke of Dale.

There was a stir of interest. The girls were intrigued, envious, dug at me with sharp little tongues like claws.

"Better look out for Dale." . . . "He's a devil." . . . "They say a girl of his is in—well, they call it a rest cure, but there are bars to the windows . . . you sleep easier because of them, I suppose, and alone—"

Little Molly O'Hara, a cuddly, black-haired girl with the superstition of the Auld Sod she had not left long behind her, whispered fearfully, for she had liked me when we were together:

"Ooch, Amber, darlint! They do be saying 'tis in league with the Black Wan himself that he is. Is it not frightened ye are?"

She was really a dear morsel, friendly and sweet. I gave her a little squeeze as I left the room.

"Not a bit, silly. As far as the Devil is concerned, I'm the one to drive a hard bargain."

I went out by the stage entrance, Jack waited for me there in Mr. Dale's car.

It was early spring, and cold. I wore a great cape of dull, soft blue velvet that I had bought at wholesale price from Fleurrete. It was collared with a curling sweep of black fur, standing up high around my ears, a background for my hair.

We talked trivialities on the way to the restaurant. I hardly know what I felt, except that not for eight yachts and acres of terraces would I contemplate bestowing my favors on a man I had never seen. If after I saw him I found him not to my liking, I would contemplate it even less. I was not on a remnant counter yet.

Oddly enough, I do not recall much of my first meeting

with Sumner Dale, important as it was. However, I remember my first impression. He had, I thought, the face of an actor trying to look like a gentleman, or of a gentleman trying to look like an actor, I was not sure which. Thin lips, smooth-shaven, scant blond hair, blue eyes, much seamed at the corners. He was stockily built, not much taller than I. He was pale, with a healthy enough pallor, possessed a short, brutal nose, wore impeccable clothes. His hands, I noticed at once, were rather small, not beautiful, with fine reddish hair growing down to the prominent knuckles. With their suggestion of greedy strength and power, they both repelled and fascinated me.

He was very courteous. He did not talk to me as if I were a girl in a shop, an ex-chorus girl, or even a woman with a divorce to her discredit. He talked as if I had mentality and were of his own social station, which, I may add, was one moderately high and secure as far as his birth was concerned. Under this stimulus I expanded a little. He did not say anything very personal. Another woman had joined us, I have forgotten who. I had never seen her before, I never saw her again, she was obviously there to entertain Jack.

I noted gratefully that Sumner Dale was not as most men. He did not at once plunge into attempted verbal intimacies. Once he said, merely:

"Why do you never laugh?"

And I answered, truthfully:

"I rarely see anything worth laughing at."

To which he responded:

"It is not a pose then? Nor a lack of humor? Good. I dislike women who continually show their teeth."

Again, just before we left the restaurant:

"You have superb hair. I would give a good deal to see it down."

I replied, a little at random, for his impersonal manner took me off my guard.

"It comes to my knees."

And fell silent before the light that flashed into the cold, veiled eyes. Such a naked light.

I then knew what he had reminded me of ever since we had met. Something out of my mythology. An elderly faun? He was fully forty-five. Or a satyr? Yes, surely a satyr—in evening clothes—with slightly pointed ears, very thin, in which the blood showed red.

We went home in his car, we dropped the other woman, and Mr. Dale and Jack came with me into the shabby lobby to say good night. It was a stale place glaring with imitation marble and with red velvet seats built around peeling columns. Terrible. I saw Dale's odd eyes flicker over it. He bent over my hand in a slightly exaggerated gesture of respect.

"Not wholly the right setting," he said quite casually.

I thanked him for the evening, the men left. Then I woke up the little mulatto elevator boy, who yawningly conveyed me in his dusty cage to my floor, and I went to bed.

I was disturbed. I did not like this man, Sumner Dale. I thought of wide-eyed Molly and her whispered words of warning. I almost believed her. There was a smell of sulphur about him and yet—and yet.

The next morning, or rather the same morning, I received flowers, great tea-roses, fragrant as dawn in Paradise, and yellow lilies with curled-back petals like the lips of a golden woman. There was a card with them, Dale's card, and on it in a small, fine hand:

"Please be in at tea-time."

And so it began. I saw him every day, sometimes twice a day. Every night we went somewhere, to theatre, opera, a restaurant, a large party of his friends. Every morning there were flowers. He sent me sweets and books; odd, Oriental sweets that took me back fleetingly to Uncle Paul and by that route reminded me how my letters to Father were becoming hurried and vague, and books, beautifully bound with illustrations by Beardsley or Doré; many of them were poisonous volumes, Wilde, Baudelaire, Verlaine and others. He did not give me jewels, but he would spend a whole afternoon talking about jewels until I could almost see them dripping from his thin, hairy fingers. And sometimes he would try to make me laugh.

I never grew to *like* him. But as time went on, I became obsessed by him, by that very repellant red down on his hands, by the slow turning of his hard eyes, the curious immobility of his thin mouth. I would find myself wondering what it would be like to have that mouth kiss me. Probably not like any kisses I had known; the young hasty kisses of the boy Harcourt, his more adult kisses of possession, his drunken kisses of habit—the casual kisses I had not wholly escaped since my divorce. I dreamed that Sumner Dale's kisses would be intensely different, dreamed of them with a cold shudder yet with a slow warming of my blood. It was my first experience of a man of great depravity, good breeding, and patience.

At the end of two months he said:

"I have had rooms in my apartment done over. Ready for you. Will you be able to pack and take possession tomorrow?"

Not one word of love.

I was still very young. I stammered something. The tears came to my eyes.

We were at tea in a quiet little French place. He leaned over the table, touched my hand lightly.

"You shall have everything your heart desires. *I want you, Amber.*"

That was his declaration. I saw the flame in back of the quiet eyes, warmed myself at it.

"I'll come."

My things were sent to the apartment, the car waited for me. I went there the following afternoon—in a state of suspended mental animation, as if hypnotized.

Sumner Dale opened the door for me. He led me to a long living-room furnished principally—was the first thing that struck me—with cushions; and I suddenly remembered Jack Evans and his wish to see me sitting on a cushion sewing a fine seam. The hangings were black, the divans, there were three of them, black and gold, piled with a riot of cushions of all materials, shapes, sizes and colors. There were no chairs, but numerous inlaid tables with smoking things on them, books, or flowers. The close-drawn curtains were black, no ray of sun entered, air and light came from a glass skylight which could be covered with a curious pall of velvet. There were many lights. Although it was mid-afternoon out of doors, the many subtly shaded lights were all turned on.

Dale removed my coat and my hat. Without a word he took me in his arms. When finally he released me from that first terrible kiss, I knew I was bound over to him, body and mind. I did not consider my soul. I had forgotten it.

I could not stand alone. He supported me with his arm and said:

"I shall leave you here. You are not to be hurried into things. You will please make friends with my rooms, alone.

When you are ready for me, I will come and for a while we shall travel."

I said nothing. After a minute I managed to free myself from him and walked to the nearest couch. I sat down, folded my hands in my lap, and watched him turn to ring a hidden bell. As if by magic a wizened Japanese appeared, who looked at me without the slightest curiosity on his impassive, yellow face.

"This is Miss Amber, O-Saki. You will take your orders from her."

O-Saki bowed low, almost to the black velvet that carpeted the room. He then vanished, as silently as he had arrived. Even in the chaos of my emotions he made me feel uncomfortable. I never quite recovered from this feeling.

Sumner Dale stood at a small table, tapping it with an unlighted cigarette. He looked across at me, compelled my eyes. His own were half veiled. Once, he smiled. Then I shut my own eyes, blotting out the quiet face with its look of masked triumph, and I felt tired, tired, in every bone of my body.

"You arranged with Fleurrete?"

"Yes."

"Good."

He had, of course, stipulated that I was to leave the shop at once.

He drew a note-book from his inner pocket, tore out a page, and wrote something quickly with a gold pencil.

"I shall be at this address, here is the telephone number. You are to call me when you wish me to come—home."

He did not kiss me again, merely crossed over to me, touched for a moment the hair on my forehead, then left me without a backward glance. I sat there as he had left me, glad and sorry, tired and stimulated, broken yet whole.

I tried to think. I put my head in my hands and crouched quite still. I must have slept, for when O-Saki crept in, bringing tea in fragile china, tea made by a master, I started, feeling stiff and awkward.

"Miss Amber drink?"

With the tea were little rice cakes, a pot of rose-leaf jam, a tiny glass of some liquid with specks of gold floating in it. I drank and ate, and O-Saki stood somewhere in the background and watched me, as he might have watched a stray dog or cat his master had brought home. When I had finished, I rose and stretched my arms upward, feeling oddly young, and without care. What was in that tea or liquor I did not know but I was suddenly light at heart. He came forward.

"You like to see your room?"

I followed the little, yellow man into the bedroom that Sumner Dale had designed for me.

It was a room large and odd in shape with many mirrors. The bed had surely been raped from some Doge's palace. It was massive, of a dark carved wood, and draped in heavy purple and led up to by three steps. The canopy had tassels of tarnished gold, and the inner side of the top of it was a single sheet of mirror glass, lit by hidden rose-colored lights. The walls were warm tan. For the rest the furniture was simple—a chest of drawers, a dressing-table, two easy-chairs in purple velvet, dark fur rugs on the floor, a huge wardrobe, lined with cedar and fitted with shelves for hats and shoes. The window hangings were purple, and all the little accessories were of the same color, except the lights, which were shaded with a more becoming rose-lavender. The bathroom opening from the bedroom was a marvelous apartment, white-tiled to the ceiling, with a sunken tub and more mirrors.

And off the bathroom was a room as small and severe as a monastic cell. It had a white iron bed, much like the one in which I had slept away my girlhood, a straight chair, a white dresser, and walls of rough plaster tinted oyster-gray. Over the bed hung two objects, a crucifix in bronze, and a scourge.

I did not enter. It was through the open doorway that I saw it. So rude and abrupt was the sight of it after the luxury and sensuousness of my own room that I pointed to it with a sense of outrage and asked, knowing, yet fearing the answer:

"Whose room is that?"

"My master's."

I closed the door between it and the bathroom filled with horror by the sight of that cell. I knew I was looking on the ultimate tortured expression of a perverted mentality.

Chapter VII

IN all justice, I cannot call Sumner Dale's assumption of property rights in my person a seduction. Yet, if seduction entered into it all, it was the apartment, which so expressed his personality, that seduced me.

I remained alone in it for a week. There was still time to turn back, I could have left at any moment, gone to another city, or stayed in New York and looked for "respectable" employment. I did not. I remained where I was, sitting on cushions and drinking tea, reading the books that were scattered about, lying in warm, scented baths in the marvel of a tub, manicuring my nails, eating at regular intervals the perfect little meals that O-Saki prepared and served. As the days went by, I myself began to feel something as a cushion must feel—soft and luxurious, not gifted with the power to think or move. There was an influence in the place with its black hangings and the skylight, which at night when the curtains were drawn aside revealed the wonder of the quiet stars, that sapped one's physical and moral strength and left me a will-less creature, drifting with the slow lap of incurious tides.

Sumner Dale was everywhere in the place he had built for himself, in the cell-like bedroom, in the bedroom that was mine, in the room of divans, in the small, beautiful dining-room. He was even on the roof, so to speak, in the small glassed-in roof-garden that he had had built there. I could not escape him, he pervaded the very air. And finally, with no sense of excitement, no sense that I was taking the

final step, I picked up the telephone in my room, concealed under the fluffy skirts of a French doll, and called the number he had given me.

Within half an hour he was with me.

The following week we sailed for France. For a time we stayed in Paris, where what I can only term my second trousseau was purchased. Sumner designed my gowns and supervised my hats and boots, my gloves, my underwear—all executed with perfection by the most expensive shops in that city of expense. After I was ready we traveled, by automobile, through Germany, then to the Austrian lakes and the mountains. In Germany we stayed at the Adalon in Berlin, soon tired of that immaculate city with its astounding Siegesallee and went to Weimar, where we lingered for several weeks in an ancient little inn, making short and enchanting tours of the lovely, peaceful countryside. O-Saki accompanied us as valet to his master and to take much of the burden of arranging things from our shoulders, to guard and watch—always conspicuously unobtrusive.

I cannot say I was happy. I was not happy. I was excited. I had never before had the numbing sensation of possessing, or sharing in, apparently bottomless money bags. I had thought that when Harcourt took me from my former pinched life of penny-counting, he had opened marvelous doors into ease, though even while I was still his wife I realized that our subsisting on the bounty of his father, always spending our allowance two months in advance, our never being out of debt was, from a merely financial point of view, a poor exchange for the scrupulously honest poverty I had been accustomed to before.

With the advent of Sumner my viewpoint changed again. I was never obliged even to think of money. I charged

where and what I pleased, Sumner paid the bills, I had my own account at a French bank, and would have one in New York when we returned. Sumner was generous. Not like many men who take mistresses, who support and clothe them, but let them feel that at any moment clothes and jewels may be snatched from them, that they may not call a dollar their own. I have met the mistresses of such men, and they have told me rather proudly of the deceptions to which they were forced to stoop. One woman—and many others I presume—made a practice of coming to an arrangement with all the shops at which she had charge accounts. She would buy a gown for, say, two hundred and fifty dollars, it would be charged to her as three hundred. Her man would pay the three hundred, and the shop would refund the difference to her in cash. It was the only way she could gather together, dollar by dollar, a little sum that would serve as an anchor to windward for the frail ship in which she had embarked, a ship dependent on a captain bound sooner or later to drive it on the rocks.

No. Sumner was the most generous man with money I have ever known. I was not obliged to account for anything.

As far as our relations were concerned, the face we showed toward the outer world was a mask of comedy. We traveled as guardian and ward. My maid, one we had procured in Paris, was discreet and accustomed to the service of such women as I. O-Saki was a graven image of silence. We were careful in public, we occupied the sort of suites to cause sophisticated managements to shut their eyes, the lids thereof being heavily weighted with American gold. Sumner looked old enough for the position of guardian; I seemed very young. It was quite simple. I have often wondered at it. As long as I lived with Sumner Dale, and I lived with him

for seven years, we never had the slightest trouble at any hotel. It was curious and it was significant.

New York knew, as much of it as had known me. On our return my obloquy was complete. All the people I had known when I bore Harcourt's name cut me openly, while the girls I had met in the chorus and the shop were, for the most part, frankly envious and tried to seek me out. This Sumner forbade. He wished me to make a clean sweep of them all. He could not tolerate second-class women, he said; which was a pose. Jack Evans we still saw. He had known, from the first. He had even come to the dock to see us off, with a proper mingling of regret and congratulation in his bearing. And he was there to meet us when we landed. As for father——

I wrote to him, from the boat. A letter followed me from Paris to Germany. He wrote that he had long known I would take just such a step. He did not cast me off. He would not throw the first stone. But he would never see me again as long as I lived under the roof of my lover. If ever I decided to change my mode of life I was to write him. He offered, in those circumstances, to take me away, to another city, to protect me with his good name. He made no reproaches, did not even plead with me. It was as if he thought the inherited evil in my blood a thing like a fever that must run its devastating course. That his honorable head was brought to the very dust, I knew. He did not say so. He signed himself my loving father.

It was almost winter when we came back to New York, and we set out again at once for California, where Sumner owned property in Santa Barbara, that dream place by the blue sea. We lived there, quietly, for the winter and spring. I met no women, merely men, who were friends of Sumner's and were traveling. Some of them stayed with

us. They were a little too courteous, but in no other way made me feel my position. The following summer, when I had almost lost the sense of being in a position at all, we came back East, and Sumner bought a place on Long Island.

There for five years, we lived, winter and summer, with an occasional trip to town, during the colder months.

Of my intimate relations with my lover there is little that may be said. I will say this. There was no spontaneity in him. He would work himself up to a deliberate, cold-blooded passion as religious fanatics drug and dance themselves into ecstasy. He approached the gratification of his senses with rites and mummery. He bought a dozen costumes for me, the costumes of pre-Revolutionary France, of Oriental dancing-girls, Chinese costumes—an infinite variety. According to the mood into which he had consciously thought himself I was to be dressed in one or the other, and must pose and posture for him by the hour. I soon sickened of this, but he held me under an evil enchantment. I was the creature of his will.

He would often leave me at our home, "Carcassonne," and go to town. What he did there I never knew. He would telephone me three or four times a day, would write me, as often, the strangest letters, more compelling than his actual voice, and nakedly indecent. And would return, unexpectedly as a rule, by motor or by yacht, and without a word as to what had occurred in his absence, stroll into the house, kiss me lightly, and lay in my lap some new bauble, a jewel, an inlaid cigarette case, a powder box of rare enamel or lapis lazuli. I never questioned him about his trips. I had done so once, he had looked at me and said "I do not find it convenient to be questioned;" and that was an end of that.

Carcassonne was a lovely place, two hundred acres on a little lost arm of the Sound. The house was not large, but it was complete and furnished much as had been the New York apartment. I complained, when first we took possession, that it was too Italian and medieval in the interior decorations to be wholly appropriate for a summer place, but Sumner pointed out to me, with some truth, that the place was an all-year-round place, and too much wicker or cretonne would be chilly to live with in winter. There were garages and stables and moorings for the smaller boats. The ocean-going yacht was kept at a nearby shipyard.

That summer was all laziness and delight. We were often on the yacht, leaving Carcassonne for days and weeks at a time. Then came the first winter on Long Island, a winter in which I was much alone, in which I read a great deal and tried to think myself a happy woman. When our second summer in Carcassonne and our third together came, with a riot of ramblers and gardens overflowing with loveliness, Sumner grew restless. He had been playing at domesticity. Now he was tired. He tired so easily.

So we entertained a great deal. We had enormous parties of men for weekends and holidays. At first it was all circumspect enough. Then three out of five of the men scheduled for a weekend brought women with them. When I was informed that such must be the case I was honestly indignant. Sumner listened to my avowals of distaste with a slow, thin smile.

"Thanking God that you are not as these others?" he inquired, coolly.

I said nothing more. I realized suddenly that kept women cannot be choosers. My house now was frequently filled with women of my class, loud women often, beautiful women always, women who drank and smoked and swore like men

and who had a vast enough contempt for men in general and their own in particular. Women whose endearments, one to the other, were ready and whose claws even readier. They were not wholly disgusting, some of them were good-hearted creatures. I recall one woman who must have been fifty and for thirty years had been the mistress of one man. She was rather proud of it. He was perfectly well able to marry her and she remarked to me that when he would be going on seventy he probably would marry her, as he had a terror of being left alone to die. She was very fat, very laced and had brass-colored hair. She was most maternal in her attitude toward the other girls, very generous with advice, very stark in her speech. Once, in the dark ages, she had been of that vanished race, a soubrette. And she never forgot it.

"It was my legs, my dear," she would say. "They made my fortune." They were still slim, to be sure, and well turned, for all the weight they bore. She clothed them in the sheerest stockings procurable and shod the small feet attached to them with the most extreme shoes she could find, buckled and strapped, high-heeled and short-vamped. Sticking them out she would gaze upon them complacently.

"All I got left," she would sigh.

"Girlie" everyone called her. And there was something happy and girlish about her, something naïve and youthful. The man with whom she had lived for so long that the relation was surely a marriage if ever there was one, was tremendously proud of her. She could have laid him across her knee and spanked him. I have no doubt she often did, for "Ralphie," as she called him, was a thin little man, very gray and wrinkled, with gleaming, young blue eyes and dapper clothes. He thought there was "no one like Girlie." As a matter of fact, she *was* very good to him, mothered

him, cooked his favorite dishes, darned his socks, and nursed him in his frequent illnesses. He was a grandfather several times over as he had had children by an early marriage. His wife had died leaving him considerable means, which were to pass from his hands in the event of a remarriage.

"A very determined woman, Amber," he once told me as we sat together on the dock fishing for snappers, "and very jealous. She was a good bit older than I—and—well, I was a beau in those days."

Poor little Ralphie. He had never worked for a living. And he could not have contemplated marrying his Girlie and losing his income. Girlie, however, had been saving for years. She told me that in another ten years, when she would be sixty and Ralph sixty-eight, she would have saved enough to keep them in comfort for the rest of their span and to bury them decently. Then she would demand that Ralphie marry her, and she was sure he would. It seems too absurd and tragic to write, but that ridiculous, fat woman with her bald speech and her peroxided head had planned a wedding dress. For thirty years she had planned it. In her dream it had not altered with the fashions.

White it must be, heavy satin, with insets of point lace, and a train; there must also be orange blossoms.

Poor Girlie. She died before her dream was realized, died of a stroke three years after she told me this. And Ralphie, desolate as any widower, more desolate than most, buried her in white satin and laid orange blossoms on the coffin.

It dawned on me that almost all the women I met at this time looked on marriage as the one thing worth praying for. If they could only be married!

"It's all right while it lasts," Lottie Vayne told me once. She was a very pretty girl whose lover was a married man.

"It's all right while it lasts. Lots of fun—jewels and clothes and champagne to bathe in. But one morning it's: 'Hell—you're getting old.' And then where are you? From one to the next and then—the streets!" She shuddered, and I, from the security that seemed to wrap me round, was roused enough from it to feel an answering chill.

"I never could save a damn cent," said Lottie, reflectively, "I'm just like the girls you read about. I've got a mother and father in Ohio. Isn't it like a book? And I send 'em what I can scrape together. Frank's as close as the grave. Sure, I send it to them. They think I'm on the stage."

After a minute she got up from the couch where she had been sitting beside me and said over her naked shoulder.

"Well, why so sober? Cheer up, Amber, it's all the same in a thousand years." And leaving me, she went to the piano and tore from the patient keys the maddest melodies of the day.

Lottie Vayne had set me thinking. From that day I managed to save. I really had small use for the money Sumner gave me, except for presents and other charming frivolities. I opened a savings-bank account. And I told him.

"I'm putting some money away," I said. "Do you mind?"

We were on the yacht, alone. He pushed back his cap and looked at me.

"Thinking of leaving me, Amber?"

"No."

He rang for O-Saki and a drink. When he took his finger from the bell he said:

"Of course I don't mind. Why should I? It's your money! You are wise."

It was characteristic of the man that the knowledge I was saving against the day he tired of me did not cause him to

lessen his money gifts to me by one dollar. In his heart he probably knew he would tire and, if it did not suit his convience to provide for me, abundantly, would have been casually upset to believe me without means.

You understand that he could have married me. He was quite free. His third and last wife had divorced him. His two children by his first wife were sons over twenty-one. One was married and never saw his father. The younger, a physical replica of Sumner, came to visit us. He hated me, but he was greedy for money and had always managed to be on an amiable footing with his father's peccadillos for fear of displeasing him.

Respectable women knew me not. Naturally Carcassonne was shunned by summer and winter people alike. Only the tradespeople entered our gates, except for begging persons, who cared little what life the sinners led as long as they provided the means to save others—probaby in China. The village doctor came on call and was inclined to be friendly, whereas the postmistress, when I sometimes called for my mail, gave me each piece as though it were a separate bomb.

Then once, on a visit to town, Sumner met some Navy people and amazed me by bringing two of them, Lieutenant Powers and his young wife, to Carcassonne.

Chapter VIII

SUMNER'S only warning was to telephone that he was bringing "a couple." I had rooms made ready for them and prepared myself to meet any one of a dozen left-handed pairs that I knew. Or even one that I didn't. When the motor returned from the station with a young man in uniform and a younger girl in what was very evidently home-made garb, I was more than amazed. The introductions took place, and I had no time alone with Sumner until bedtime. Dinner was served immediately upon their arrival, as the train had been late, and after dinner we played bridge and listened to Sally Powers babble about her "service experience," which had comprised all of six months. To my astonishment I learned that an invitation had been issued her in my name to stay with me for a week or two, as her husband was stationed on his ship not far from us for target practice.

Sally Powers was a light-headed little person, with the face of a cherub and shrewd black eyes under dark hair. She was obviously impressed with her surroundings and spent most of her time admiring me, the furniture, my pearls and our stately house-cat, Lallun, a great gray Persian. Her husband was good-looking in a meaningless way. I doubt if one would have noticed him out of uniform.

She called him Buddy. Which describes her sufficiently.

After our guests had gone to their rooms and I was in mine, with the maid dismissed, Sumner prowling about, picking up ornaments from various tables, laying them

down again, and smiling to himself in a way I knew and disliked, I said:

"What on earth do you mean by bringing those—decent little people to this house?"

He straightened up from a survey of an amber comb, carved and heavy, which was on the night table, and asked, in his turn:

"You object?"

"I certainly do."

He spread his hands, then shrugged, like a Frenchman.

"My dear Amber, there is no pleasing you. I bring certain ladies to this house, you cry out that they are not respectable, you are loath to associate with them. Very well. On my recent trip to town I fall in with this attractive young pair. I bring them here, and you cry out that they are respectable and that therefore you cannot have them as your guests! You are really exceptionally *difficile*. I took quite a fancy to Powers, he is a nice lad. They know practically no one in New York outside of Navy people. She is from the West, and so is he. I thought it would amuse you to have a girl of your own age here for a while. You need not worry, they have no idea of the irregularity of this ménage, they look on me as a pleasant elderly guardian person and on you as the romantic young ward, living a secluded life. I quite touched them with a picture of how secluded. Remember only that you were educated in a French convent! That puts the final polish on it."

He was still smiling. There was something back of this. I knew and feared his motive. Why should he wish to burden himself with two people as commonplace as these? For they were all of that. Their youth and freshness were their only claim to distinction.

I made another demur. He said:

"My darling child, this, I may remind you, is my house."

After which I said nothing, merely went on undressing. What could I say?

Sally Powers stayed several weeks, her husband came over weekends and sometimes evenings. We sent the motor to his landing station.

Our only other guests while they were with us were men, never women. And they were carefully selected for their discretion, or else carefully instructed beforehand. How the pair of them could have been so blind, I do not know. Apparently they accepted the situation as it had been explained to them, and that was all there was to it.

I soon fancied that I saw Sumner's object. He took a quiet pleasure in surrounding the little couple with things they had never dreamed existed; in the few short weeks they were with us he thoroughly spoiled them for life on the pay of a U. S. N. lieutenant. Sally was emboldened to taste her first cocktail, to smoke, so she said, her first cigarette. When, as often happened, something was said not quite innocuous, her eyes would grow round and big and she would steal a quaint look at her large unconscious husband and then chuckle quietly to herself. I soon discovered that she was ready to confide in me the most sacred intimacies of her short married life, and I found the role of innocent listener a trifle difficult to play. She was also curious to know how and why I was the ward of such a "delightful man." That I found hard to explain and was forced to tell Sumner and listen to him weave, with, I knew, inner delight, a long and entrancing story of a dear defunct friend who had left his "little girl" in Mr. Dale's tender hands. . . . It amused him, I hated it.

Sally was forever harping on the romance of my situation and pitying me because I saw no "young" men" at all, hint-

ing that my guardian was jealous and wished to keep me unmarried in order to tend him in his advanced old age. She finally had her husband occasionally bring young officers to the house. If they were curious about me they never showed it. They drank Sumner's wines and smoked his cigarettes with nonchalant ease and pleasure. One of them was an ensign, a Southern boy. His name was David Masters.

I would rather hurry a little over this part of the story. David Masters was very young, he was unsophisticated, he was susceptible. I did not fall in love with him, as Sumner often suggested in a casual manner, but I was terribly touched by his worshipful admiration. His appearance was very charming, he was tall and blond with laughing eyes and a gay, fresh mouth. And his hands were brown and strong.

From the first he thought he wanted to marry me. On our second meeting he said so, quite humbly, and told me, with the gay eyes clouded, that his people were not wealthy; that I would have to "give up all this" and follow him around the world on an ensign's fortune; that he was not good enough for me, but was offering me his best. . . . I was as high as the stars above him, yet "Oh, Amber, dearest little Amber, I love you so much."

Nothing in all my life has hurt me, knowing what I knew —myself—quite as much as that boy's young infatuation.

Sumner observed the signs and symptoms and was much amused. He was not in the least jealous, he congratulated me on my "effect," professed sorrow for the misguided youth, asked me often how I was going to "get out of it." He knew I had gone too far along paths of passionate perversity to be stirred, physically, by anything this boy could offer me. He could not guess how much I was stirred—in the soul I was yet able to call my own, such as it was.

Sally was much interested. Tried to arrange meetings for us, maneuvered very openly, that we should be left alone.

As gently as I could I told David that I did not love him. That cast him down but did not daunt him. His whole life, in which to make me love him, was ahead of him, he said.

I trembled at the thought of what would happen to him when he *knew*. I imagined that Sumner trembled too, but with impatience. He would not raise a hand to hurry the eventual end, but he knew it would be a source of keenest amusement to him to observe the change in David when he knew me for what I was. The fact that the knowledge would torture the boy made it all the more humorous. It was ironical in the extreme, Sumner reasoned, that he should indirectly introduce his mistress to a man who looked on *her* as someone akin to the angels and on *him* as a good-hearted, lavish old gentleman, a guardian of innocence.

Fortunately David was transferred to another ship before the knowledge came to him. For a long time his lovely misspelled boyish letters reached me. Then, as I learned from a fellow-officer's letter about a year and a half later, he died of fever in Hawaii—died without knowing. I am glad of that, glad to remember him, glad to know he was happy in unhappy love, as very young people often are. He remains, stripped of Sumner's share in it and of my own shameful terror, a dear memory among many memories that are dreadful.

During the last week of Sally Powers' visit to us she "ran into" a woman in the summer settlement whom she had known at home. This woman, as were all of the summer visitors, was well informed concerning Carcassonne. Sally came home from the postoffice her cheeks flying two red flags of excitement.

Sumner was not at home, young Powers was on his ship.

Sally came straight to my room where I was having my hair waved, fidgeted until the maid was finished and dismissed, then broke out:

"I met a woman downtown—a Mrs.—it doesn't matter. But she told me about—you."

My heart turned over. I braced myself for what must come. To my surprise she said, very low:

"It doesn't matter to me—it doesn't matter at all."

I faced her then. I was really moved. I thought her friendship must be real and staunch to withstand that shock. But she was saying, still low, with her eyes away from mine:

"I have always wanted to know—have wondered. But Buddy must never guess—he is terribly narrow and strict. I shan't tell him, and I'll see to it that he doesn't learn."

She looked at me then. Her eyes were really odd. In them the look of some morbid girl who has found a forbidden book in her father's library and takes it to her room to gloat over it; a look of barest curiosity and excitement. If ever a girl was *born* bad, it was Sally Powers.

I said, as calmly as I could:

"I am glad you know. I didn't want to have you here, Sally, I did not consider it right. But you must tell your husband. You are leaving us, anyway, very soon. Perhaps it would be best if he didn't come over for this last weekend and you joined him earlier."

What she had expected from me, I don't know. An outburst, surely. Low laughter, relief, and a letting down of all the barriers of reticence, revelations, a mental uncorseting. She was plainly disappointed.

"Oh, *don't* send me away, Amber. I love it here. And let Buddy come. He is so fond of you both. But I shan't tell

him. He would *never* forgive me for staying one moment after I knew," she said righteously.

A little gust of anger blew across my mind.

"Very well, then, you mustn't stay."

While she looked at me open-mouthed, I rang for my maid:

"Pack Mrs. Powers' things," I said, "and telephone the garage for the car. She has been called to join the lieutenant."

Sally pleaded, after Marie had left the room, she implored. She loved her life at Carcassonne. She had developed a champagne taste. But I was obdurate.

When Sumner came home Sally had gone. I told him what had happened, he was stirred to sudden unusual rage.

"The girl meant to be kind. Why didn't you let it end as she wanted it to, Amber? By God, you are a half a fool sometimes. It really doesn't become you, this unnatural dignity."

He took himself out of the room.

Summer was nearly at an end. Sumner went often to town. Young Powers' ship had sailed, Sally was living up town in New York with another "navy-widow." And from what I afterwards learned she went out frequently with her former host. *He* had no scruples, it seemed, as regarded Buddy; neither had she. And I have sometimes wondered if after all "Buddy" did not know the truth; he couldn't have been such an idiot as to be wholly blind, but was con tent to let things go on their pleasant hospitable way as long as the truth was not told him in so many uncompromising words.

As far as Sally and Sumner were concerned, when various men friends of Sumner took it upon themselves to acquaint me with facts concerning them, I did not at first make any

inquiries or scenes. But I was furiously jealous. I did not love Sumner Dale, I had never loved him, but he obsessed me, his sleek depravity, his subtle serpent love-making, his innate indifference, his atmosphere of money. And the thought that he was corrupting the readily corrupted soul and mind and possibly body of insignificant Sally Powers soon ceased to fill me with disgust, from a human point of view, and filled me instead with a searing jealousy that was nothing short of murderous.

Eventually, after one of his trips to town, I did accuse him of the flirtation. I found myself ranting like the commonest woman of them all, and he sat back and watched me, a cigarette in his hand, his eyes half shut. He did not say a word.

I called him every name I ever heard and some that I must have invented; I cried, I pleaded, I threatened. I tore the rings from my hands and threw them on the floor. He never moved. I acted like an actress in a French play, like a woman in a sensational book. I hadn't known it was in me. But I see now that the years with Sumner, the years with women of the very type I was now proving myself to be, had done their deadly stealthy work. I was no longer even the semblance of a "lady"; I was a fish-wife fighting for her man. If Sally Powers had been there at the moment, I would have torn her eyes and cheeks with my nails and pulled her black hair out by the roots. I was a primal creature, and an artificial one at the same time.

When I stopped for breath, my hair half down, my gown ruined with pulling at it, my hand bleeding where a brooch had scratched it, my cheeks flaming, he said quietly:

"I've never seen you in a temper before. It is becoming."

He got up and walked softly toward me, treading like a cat.

"Come here. Termagant!"

He put his arms around me. I struggled, and lacking Sally, scratched him, laid his cheek open with the nails I always kept very long. He laughed softly to feel the warm blood run down his cheek.

His feeling for me had long since died down to an occasional flicker. Now, under the stimulus of my attack, it flared up.

"Let me go!"

"No."

I struck at him. He picked me up and carried me to my room. There I learned the purpose of the scourge.

Later, looking back on that scene, its crisis and result, I hated Sumner Dale. He had degraded me unspeakably in my own eyes. But then I was afraid of him, and in that fear and in that hate there was a voluptuous expectancy that kept me bound to him.

And so the years went on. Sumner was never faithful. I do not think he had been after the first year, if for as long; he often left me for weeks, went South, went shooting, even abroad. Most of that time I stayed alone in Carcassonne. I was growing used to him, the fear was dying out, the harp of my emotions had been played on too often. We were really both of us growing rather fond and tolerant, like man and wife. The people I met were all the same, they differed only in faces and names. Sumner knew others, respectable men and their wives, went to their houses. But never again

did he try to introduce any nice woman to me—nice in the sense of legality.

Following Sally Powers—what happened to that little bird of passage, I wonder—there must have been others after Sumner—he had other women who interested him. But none enough to supplant me.

Chapter IX

SEVEN springs had passed since the spring I went to the apartment on lower Fifth Avenue. And it was up Fifth Avenue I was walking, one sunny day in April, when a woman approaching me took on a familiar outline. I stared. Older, heavier, coarser—but it was Bella Winston—long since married to the tardy fiancé—I had forgotten his name.

A wave of recollection swept over me.

I walked by her hurriedly, but she stopped me, with a shabbily gloved hand on my arm.

"It's—Jane?"

I forced a look of utter blankness into my eyes. It was the hardest thing I had ever done. Luckily I had seen her before she spoke, or else I could never have helped a flash of surprised recognition in my eyes, no matter what my tongue said.

"I'm afraid you are mistaken—"

But she would not let it rest.

"It is Jane. Jane, can't we go somewhere and talk?"

She had grown fat. Her face, shiny and unbeautiful, looked at me eagerly. I remembered her eyes, the good, brown eyes and the dark hair. The rest, as I recalled it, was all thickened and blurred.

I gave in.

"Dear Bella—I can't."

She stumbled awkwardly over her next words.

"I know why you say you can't, Jane. . . . But it doesn't matter. Let me talk to you."

She was the child I had played with, with whom I had reaped the first fruits of childish, illicit knowledge; she was the girl who had confided in me, sweetly, as she hemmed her very simple wedding linen, the girl who had helped me meet Harcourt, the splendid and the vanished, in the summer woods. Suddenly I was sentimental, with the easy sentimentality of women of my stamp; I wanted to cry out my shame to her, weep some of it away on her broad bosom.

"You had best not be seen with me," I said. "We can't go anywhere public. Look. I'll go home. You follow me in about ten minutes. You won't meet anyone you know. We can talk there."

She hesitated.

I read her thought.

"He," I said, without qualification, "*he* is out of town—Virginia—he will not be back for another week."

As I left her, after giving her the address, I said:

"I'll go on. If you don't come, I shall understand. But it was good to see you."

I went home and waited in an agony of apprehension. Had she been a lover I could not have been more restless. I took off my sables and my frock, slipped into a house-gown, re-arranged my hair.

The telephone rang. A lady to see me. I steadied my voice as I answered the incurious boy.

A minute later I went myself to the door and let her in.

She was like a cat in a strange place. I almost saw her feet draw back delicately as I led her into the big room,

took off her coat, pulled the pins from her hat and made her comfortable. My first word was conventional enough.

"Will you have tea?"

I don't know what made me ask it. The general rule was simply to have it brought in. I must have had a sympathetic knowledge of her inhibitions.

She shook her head. Her brown hair was graying ever so little. And Bella was only three years older than I. Thirty-two. She looked forty.

"No. No, thank you. I—I never drink it."

My intuition had been quite correct. She might come to Sumner Dale's establishment, but she would take no food of his. A little, in my heart, I applauded her.

I rang for O-Saki, told him, briefly, no tea, and dismissed him. He left, with his usual impassive face, but I saw his eyes flicker over the visitor. I knew that he would report to Sumner.

"Well, Bella?"

"Jane," she burst out, sitting uneasily on the edge of the divan, twisting her hands that were scarred with much housework, her honest eyes on mine, "Jane—why did you do it?"

Well, why? I reviewed the question in my mind. Love? Not wholly. Fear of poverty? Perhaps. Vanity? Probably. The more comprehensive answer came to me.

"I was never a strong swimmer. I drifted."

"Your father—" she said, and fell to silence, looking about the room, with a sort of horror on her face. I noticed, as one will note trifles in a tense situation, that her pretty, full lips were chapped, that she frequently bit them, disfiguring their shape.

"Tell me about him."

"He works too hard. Night and day, writing, writing, on the text-books. But he manages to live."

I was leaning back against the cushions. Now I sat up beside her, galvanized.

"But—the school?"

She looked at me then, in pity.

"You don't know?"

I caught her hands.

"I know nothing. I have had no word from him for seven years. But I have written him once a week. I felt that as long as the letters were not returned he still cared for me, was still alive. What happened to the school?"

She shook her head.

"Who knows? There were fewer pupils—he sold it, finally. He boards with Mrs. Warren. You remember her? And writes the Greek and Latin text-books."

"Fewer pupils? Could I have—indirectly—?"

She understood. Looked at me frankly.

"Possibly. Parents are careful. Things get about. It may have been they thought you would one day come home, and their boys be there. I don't know. It went on for about two years after you—after your mother died. Then, it seemed to fail completely."

"But that's not fair," I said, "not *fair*. It wasn't his fault. And I am not even his child. Just a waif, taken out of charity and love."

Bella was thoughtful.

"I have five children," she said, suddenly, and, it seemed at first, without relevance, "and I tell you, frankly, Jane, I would send no child of mine to a school where the Headmaster was unable to guard his own child—for you were his own, to all intents and purposes."

I bowed my head.

"I suppose you are right," I said humbly enough.

"I wonder," I asked her, after I had been silent for a time, thinking with a sort of stupid rage of impotence of the money piled up in three savings-banks, the money that was to keep me in my old age, "would he—take help? Oh, not," I added hastily, "knowing that it was from me. I—I have quite a lot of money, Bella. Can you think of any way to get it to him? Through a lawyer—some way? Think, Bella!"

She shook her head.

"Better not."

She was quite right. I shook off the crushing melancholy that was like a black weight on my heart and looked down at my hands, ringed and empty.

"Tell me about yourself, Bella, and the children."

She brightened a little, a flash of color came into her sallow cheeks.

"Three are boys, two are girls. I named one," she said, a little shyly, "Jane."

The tears came to my eyes, and stung. I so rarely cried now.

"I think that is the sweetest thing—" I tried to tell her.

She smiled a little.

"We were such friends. What bad children we were! But we were friends. Harry has an aunt somewhere, her name is Jane too. So I named my first girl Jane. It passed without comment. But in my heart she was named for you."

"Jane. I haven't heard that name for many years. They call me Amber now."

"I know."

Well, it wasn't remarkable. I had been in the papers often enough.

"I was married," she went on, "shortly after you were.

It had been a long engagement. Harry was earning very little as it was. He has never been strong and it is not easy for a young lawyer in a city as big as Boston. He has a partnership now and is doing quite well. But—five children are an item to feed and clothe and educate.

"We lived with mother and father for the first two years, then moved to a small house, not far from them. The Townes house. Do you remember it? It was empty when we were children, they said it was haunted. I know you and I broke in there once with Dora and her brother—Dora's dead now, died in childbirth—and fled from the place because it made noises. Well, I've lived in it for almost ten years, and if it's haunted it's haunted by struggle and sickness and poverty. But we are all right now. We have a little car, the three boys and one girl are at school, the littlest girl is still a baby—she is three. . . . I am going to have another baby, Jane," she said abruptly.

"Oh, Bella, if I could only do something for you! Would you let me help with the little clothes? You wouldn't? But it would be kind, Bella."

With the dearest gesture she leaned to me and kissed my cheek.

"What a lovely skin you have, Jane," she said, and then: "I couldn't. I would have to tell Harry. And I can't tell Harry. He is, like most men—you know. He would hate it. I shall not tell him about seeing you. After all, he is my husband and supports me and the children, and we love him, he is so good to us, Jane, you have no idea how good. And I couldn't do anything to hurt him. This once I shall deceive him and keep silent. But I mustn't do more."

I nodded.

"Promise me," I begged her, "if ever things are very bad—if you need anything—money—help of any kind, you will

come to me. You need only write me, Bella. I will give you the name of my bank, you could write there."

"I can't promise. Harry would rather starve. Oh, don't wince like that, my dear . . . forgive me. . . . But I had to tell you."

"But if ever the children were sick," I urged, "or Harry? Surely, surely then you would call on me."

Her eyes lit then, to such a lovely flame.

"Yes," she said, "for Harry or the children. Never for myself."

"Tell me more about the children."

"They're good children," she answered, "not unusual in any way. Good minds, strong bodies, healthily mischievous, but reasonable and obedient. The boys look much like me. And the one girl, Jane, is a replica of what I was at her age. The baby looks a little like her father's family, she is very pretty and very intelligent. I—I love them all," she said, "but somehow the baby always comes closest."

The afternoon waned and the shadows in the room deepened. O-Saki came in on velvet feet and lit, here and there, a lamp.

"Jane, are you happy?"

The impulse to loose sentimentality had long since left me. At the abrupt question it came back. I wanted to cry, to feel her arm around me, to—I don't know what.

"I suppose so."

"No, you are not. Jane, is there nothing you can do now? You are so young—"

"Work?" I asked wildly. "At what? Go back on the stage trailing my story with me? It would be the same thing over again. A few months of trying, then the nearest man. I am so steeped in this luxury, this softness, it is in my every fiber. Marry? Who would marry me?"

She did not answer. Sat still, her hands between her knees.

"If you could go back," she said, "I wonder if I would advise marriage. Almost twelve years," she went on, in half sentences, incoherent, her words coming with a hard little rush, "cooking and sweeping, baking and nursing. Too tired at night to go out, or too tied down, your man sick, one of the children ailing. Many a night I have watched Harry walk the floor with a crying baby when I knew he had had a hard day at the office, and I was too ill to help him, too poor to have a nursemaid. It's like a comic picture," she said with bitterness. "I suppose— Then as each child turned the corner of difficult babyhood, there was another one coming or so it seemed. Oh, this incessant childbearing. Your strength sapped with it, with nursing, with all that goes with it. When I knew that I was going to have this baby, the one that is coming, I think for a moment I prayed it would die, and I with it."

From out of my sophistication I could only stare at her.

"Bella—but there are ways—your father?"

"Father? The old-fashioned doctor? And Harry is a Catholic. You didn't know that?"

I knew but had forgotten.

She looked around the room again. There was a curious hunger, an unwilling hunger in her eyes.

"All this . . . so soft, and easy. I suppose you have a maid to dress and undress you, breakfast in bed. I used to think, if I could only have breakfast in bed, I wouldn't mind the rest so much. I don't miss the clothes, or the jewels. I never had them. When I went to the hospital to have my babies I thought it was heaven to lie there mornings, rested, idle, and be waited on. I shouldn't have come here, Jane. I can't tell you how unsettled it makes me

feel. I abhor it—and I envy it. Oh, don't think we don't envy you others sometimes, we 'good' women."

I clutched at her hand. Something of what I felt had to be said.

"Don't you think I have—worked for this?" I asked. "Earned it, perhaps? Don't you think I would change with you? Many a day after you leave me I will long to change with you. And yet I couldn't, if the chance were given me to start again. I'd remember this and couldn't."

"I must go," she said, staring in front of her, "it's all a muddle—what one has, what one wants."

I thought of the Vayne girl and said:

"It's all the same in a thousand years."

She had risen, a little heavily. I saw now the thickening of her figure. I had not at first noticed it, she was so altogether changed.

I rose with her, took her hands.

"Thank you for coming."

"I should not have come," she said strangely, "for both our sakes. Jane, don't think of me as unhappy. Most of the time I am just—stupid. And I am used to my rut. We do have happy times. . . . the little car, and the children running in and out. I wouldn't give up the children. They make up for it all. And I love them so much. If I have rebelled—well, none have been *born unwanted*. I've grown to love them before they were born. I couldn't ever have let them come unwanted. It's only at the very first that you feel so trapped. Later, it's all different. They are there, needing you, little, helpless, seeking. You want to do so much for them."

I accompanied her to the door. I was in a panic at losing her.

"I suppose I'll not see you again, Bella?"

"No, better not."

She kissed me once, and then again. "For Jane," she murmured.

Her hand on the door, she turned.

"I said you wouldn't see me again. But if ever you need me, really need me, Jane—you'll tell me? I will make it right with Harry."

She left me then, with that word of comfort.

Chapter X

THE meeting with Bella left me strangely shaken. I had a sense of being painfully uprooted. It wasn't like me, or, at least, not like my conscious self. Nevertheless, I *was* shaken; I was dizzy. My present existence seemed strange and yet familiar, like a room to which a patient wakes out of a fever.

For days I went about with a faint sickishness in the pit of my being. I'd awake in the morning sick of myself, sick of the day ahead of me, sick of the things I was called upon to do or leave undone, sick of my torrid too-luxurious surroundings. I was gasping for fresh air.

I was gasping for fresh air, longing for a cooling breeze to come and cure me of my nausea.

It came.

I had meant not to speak of this episode. I had meant to keep it locked in my heart and leave it to my memory alone. But if I am to be honest, as I determined to be, I cannot omit it from a record of my life.

Word came from Sumner that he would have to stay away longer than he had originally planned. There had already been some hot weather, and I found myself remembering a delicious day in May, long before, when Bella and I had gone to the woods and brought home hepaticas, windflowers, and early white violets. She and I would never go on a jaunt like that again. I smiled to think of my present women acquaintances tramping through mud and dead leaves in search of the shy spring blossoms. I wondered if

I myself would do such a thing now.—But why not? Might that not be the very thing for me? Sumner was still to be gone some time. I knew of a little place which, even before Bella reappeared, had attracted me.

A little French dressmaker who made my simpler gowns for occasions on which I chose to be less conspicuous, had told me about it. It was a place outside a small village in the hill country of Eastern Pennsylvania which an aunt and uncle of hers ran as a combination of farm and boarding-house. The aunt, she had told me, was an excellent cook, the rooms kept exquisitely clean, and the surrounding country beautiful.

The very thing! I would do it. I revived like a flower in water.

I sent a wire to Sumner, had my maid (to her horror) pack only a few of my simpler garments, chiefly sports clothes, the sort I wore in the autumn on Long Island, and left for my little Eden the day after I made my decision.

Maison Pierre exceeded my anticipations. It was a small revolutionary cottage, with later additions, which the old couple had had the good sense to furnish in simple Colonial style. They made me welcome, and deplored the fact that there were so few other guests to keep me company. "But tomorrow," said Madame, "we s'all 'ave a very charming gentleman. 'E's been here twice before, always in ze spring."

No premonition stirred in me. I only smiled faintly, thinking I should do better by myself than with company of their providing.

At dinner the same evening I observed the guests. One was an old lady who had come to recuperate from the grippe, the other, her companion, was also an old lady. From behind you couldn't tell the two black bodies apart. A young couple on their honeymoon interested me more, plain young

things, unextraordinary enough, but enfolded in the glamour of their situation.

Once the girl cast a look of longing at my dress—one of the inconspicuous and—to me—commonplace dinner gowns made by my little French dressmaker. I saw her whisper to her husband. They sat not far from me, and I half heard, half filled in his reply from watching his lips.

"Yes, I suppose so. Don't care for the type myself."

His eyes added: "Yours is the beauty for me." She blushed.

And to him, I have no doubt, in those first enchanted hours, she had all the tremulous wonder of the day-star.

After dinner Madame and her husband chatted with me some more, about New York, about Paris, about their employment as cook and butler for people in New York before they took the farm. Their precise resonant French intonation made a pleasant sing-song in my ears, and I listened and answered in a dream. I was lulled.

And fell fast asleep at the incredible hour of nine-thirty.

It was at lunch the next day that I first saw him. I had come in a little late from a long walk, and when I entered the dining-room, he was already seated at a table facing mine, reading a magazine while waiting for the first course to be served. That gave me a chance to study him.

A big man, broad shouldered, with the bluest of blue eyes sloping up at the outer corners, and shining all the bluer by contrast with his tanned skin. When the waitress came to serve the soup—I breathed its delicious fragrance hungrily, as I never had at Delmonico's or Sherry's—he and she chatted a few moments. I liked his voice, deep but clear, I liked his Southern accent, I liked his manner with the waitress, friendly, even intimate, but not familiar. They evidently knew each other from his earlier visits,

"We've got a surprise for you," she said, smiling.

"Mushrooms?"

"Yes, Monsieur's own growing."

I laughed ironically within myself to think of Amber Lee being witness to such idyllic scenes.

But here in this place, perhaps, I wasn't Amber Lee. As a matter of fact, I had written and made reservation in the name of Jane Lee—Bella had stuck to Jane.

Over the vegetable course, served separately, French style, our eyes encountered. I saw a look of wonder come into his. He did not withdraw them. They lingered on my face, rose to my crown of hair, came back to my eyes. It was I who looked away.

After lunch we were introduced quite simply by Madame.

"Mr. Hunter—Miss Lee. Mr. Hunter stops here every year on his trips to New York."

We bowed and shook hands. Then I went straight to my room.

I can't say that during the afternoon in my room, which I spent chiefly in reading and writing notes and looking at the view from my windows, I gave much thought to Mr. Hunter. I merely speculated a little as to what his occupation was and what took him on regular trips to New York. The look of wonder in his expression when our eyes had met was something I was accustomed to in men. Though—this I had to say to myself—there had been none of the offensive quality which always marked other men's stare. Stare. That was it. Other men stared. Mr. Hunter looked.

No, I gave little thought to Mr. Hunter in my room. Yet something made me go down a few minutes before the first bell rang for dinner and look at the register.

In a large sprawling hand:

"Noel Hunter. Texas."

Of course. Texas. I knew I had met him before. In a book. A Zane Gray hero!

I seated myself beside the table where the much-fingered back numbers of French and American magazines lay, and took one of the French journals, but did not read.

The bell rang. Noel Hunter came downstairs. I kept my eyes on the French journal. Steps approached and paused at my chair. I looked up.

"Miss Lee—shall we—will you—oh, may I sit with you at dinner?"

The honeymoon bride looked at us curiously, hungrily, as we seated ourselves at my table in the dining-room.

A still, small voice within me told me I should have refused. To this day I do not know whether I am glad or sorry that I didn't.

Noel Hunter seemed not to be curious about me. With the frankness of the Westerner he told me all about himself. Owned a ranch in Texas—so there *was* a ranch!—worked and managed it himself, but had some interests in the East, too, which brought him to New York once a year. This time, before returning home, he was going to Cornell for class re-union. (A college graduate, then. I hadn't been as sure of that as of the ranch, though he spoke a good English. But many Southerners do.) The way he came to stop every year at Maison Pierre was that Madame was a friend of one of his men, and he had asked Mr. Hunter to look her up in New York when she had worked there as cook. (The next day I was to hear from Madame that Mr. Hunter had learned of her and her husband's desire to leave service and start a boarding-house, and had helped them with money and in all sorts of ways. It was through his connections that they had found Maison Pierre and secured it at a low price.)

There was a good deal more Noel Hunter told me about himself. Among other things, that he was thirty-three and unmarried.

That bit of naïveté made me smile to myself. Outwardly, I am sure, I was nothing but an attentive listener.

He spoke of the work on the ranch—what splendid "pals" the men were.

"And the women?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," he said, "the women are great pals, too. Yes, yes, they are, great pals. But—but—they're not—not wonderful—not—" I could feel him summoning his courage for the next—"not like—you!"

I raised my eyes to his without replying. The sarcastic devil dwelling within me said:

"Probably not."

In the West the red-and-gold days of the six-shooter and the dance-hall were over. But it was with the dance-hall woman, living now only in fiction, with whom I should be on an equal footing in his part of the country.

I dropped my eyes to my plate and crumbled bread. When I lifted them again, his look was still upon me.

"Not wonderful—not like you," he murmured again, as in a spell.

The first faint rumblings of a volcano. I knew it—knew there were elemental forces in this man that I could, but should not release. There was still time to withdraw.

Every bit of reason in me told me it was the one thing to do, in fairness to him, who was so innocent of my real self, in fairness to Sumner Dale, to whom I felt I owed both actual fidelity and even the outer semblance of it, and in fairness to myself, when I knew I was in danger of being scorched, if not entirely consumed, by the overflow of lava. What led me on, it is hard to say. Perhaps a lingering

sentiment, the after-effects of Bella's visit, for something fresh and vigorous. I should have it once in my life, I told myself. Not always, not always the dull glazed eyes, the jaded senses, that had to be whipped into life and glow by strange, perverted novelties. Just once the man with young keen emotions.

"Tomorrow, I heard him saying, "tomorrow morning, shall we take a walk together?"

Still time to withdraw. A simple No would do it.

"You're fond of walking, aren't you?" There was a note of anxiety in his voice. I couldn't fail him in that. I had to admit that I was fond of walking.

"Well, then?"

"All right."

Fool!

At ten o'clock the next day we started out together. It was a delicious day, cool yet soft, like the day Bella and I had gone on our jaunt.

Something went loose in me. I actually spoke of myself, or rather of Jane Saunders, and her father, and her uncle from China, and the school for boys. I could see it all making an impression.

Two things occurred on that walk which have never been repeated in my experience, though I know they are of sufficiently common occurrence and are the sort of episode written of *ad infinitum* in novels. Had I, too, stepped into Zane Gray's fiction?

Coming down a long slope on one of the muddiest roads with the deepest ruts we saw a mired wagon in the dip ahead of us. The farmer stood cracking his whip and bawling. The horses would strain, throw up their heads, stagger and fall back. Again and again.

"Damn!" Noel Hunter muttered. "Stupid!"

As soon as we came within calling distance he cried:

"Wait a bit. I'll give you a hand."

And on reaching the wagon, he "gentled" the horses. He stroked their necks and noses, eased their collars, took some sacking from the wagon and rubbed their steaming sides. Then extracted some loaf-sugar from one of his pockets and fed it to them.

"Always carry it for emergencies like this," he explained. And to the farmer: "Good beasts." The farmer nodded and assented.

"Now let's look for some sharp rocks that will do for spading."

In a few moments he and the farmer each set to work with the rocks to spade away the mud that covered the tires of the front wheels. Hunter paused for a moment to teli me—as though I were quite accustomed to physical labor—to gather more rocks, small ones, which he would use to pave the ruts in front of the wheels, once the mud was shoveled away from around them.

In ten minutes, without any straining or tugging from the horses, the wagon was rolling along the road.

And *I* had held the reins while the men pushed the wheels!

I confess I was stirred. I had a sensation, or an emotion, or a desire, I don't know what, such as I never had before and have never had since. It was a sort of sisterly inclination to this man. Or was it a longing to have him for a brother?

I pictured myself, with delight in the picture, as a young thing rolling with him in a hayloft, or as a schoolgirl being teased by him and having my braids pulled, yet sharing his boyish confidences. I saw myself, like today, taking long walks and being instructed in natural lore. I could even see myself kissing him when he went off to college.

The other incident followed soon after.

The road had emerged from the woods on to a level bit where there were scattered houses. We passed a woman carrying a shrieking baby.

"Oh, dear!" we heard her exclaim, and, as if the baby could understand: "I forgot the hammer. *Must* I go all the way back!"

Noel offered his services—not to go back but to carry the baby to the next house, which was the woman's home, while she went back to fetch the hammer.

There was nothing attractive about that baby; it wasn't particularly clean, nor particularly dirty. I could never have done what he did. He "gentled" it as he had the horses; he gave it a lump of sugar, too, with a wink at me. Under his big brown touch it stopped crying; at sight of the sugar it smiled and put out greedy hands.

We sat on the porch and waited for the woman.

I questioned myself. I found myself harboring—affection. Affection for this big brown man with the simple clear blue eyes. When life made me sore, I'd like him to "gentle" me, too.

Was it more than affection? Honestly, no. There were none of those hot flutterings in me that accompany the passions.

And so, a little secure within myself, revelling in feelings of a "little sister" for a "big brother," I was altogether unprepared for what happened the next day.

We were out on a walk together again. He told me more of his life. I visualized it clearly. He was the son of well-to-do people in Dallas, brought up in the bracing atmosphere of a large family, adoring his brisk, clever mother, his large-hearted, easy-going father; loving his brothers and sisters, quarrelling with them, laughing with them, shoulder to

shoulder with them in the common life of the family. This was a life I had not known, the wonderful American family life that one is inclined to think has passed out with the pioneers and the covered wagon; united and sane, healthy and growing. I was sick with an authentic envy as I listened to him and made my unimportant comments.

As he spoke of these things—that he was the only child still unmarried, and that his parents were anxious for him to settle down—I had forcibly to remind myself that I was Amber Lee, sterile, useless, a server of unholy wine at the stained altars of a veiled, obscene divinity. I had no right to be listening.

We had left the main road, turned down a lane, and ascended a rocky knoll where the buds of columbine were already showing. I stood looking at the long stretch of the ridges, all unconscious at the moment of his actual physical presence, but thinking of him, still thinking, that I, the mistress of Sumner Dale, had no right to be listening to the undefiled self-revelations of this simple creature, when—

"Jane!" I heard.

And still I was unprepared for what came next. He stood before me bare-headed, hat in hand.

"Jane—will you—marry me?"

The supreme, the ultimate tribute.

I closed my eyes. Other men had loved me in the fleeting urge of flesh. Love, on their lips, was a synonym for lust. David Masters, dead in a far land, had loved me with a boy's first adoration, with poetry and dreams. I have said that nothing ever touched me as closely as that. It was true. For Noel Hunter's love did not touch me—it was no wistful thing, vainly longing, begetting pity and sorrow. In that instant I realized that it had an awesome quality, with

sweep and breadth, and the power and the beauty of a tremendous virility.

My eyes unclosed to the burning eagerness of his. The whole man was breathless, hanging on my answer.

Why had I not foreseen? How could I have been so blind? What other thought or demand could be harbored by that crystal clear mind? But I was not accustomed to men like Noel Hunter. My men had had twisted minds, clouded with passion.

Passion!

Passion was here too, it breathed from him, it encompassed me like a hot wind. But reverence went with it, and tenderness—a trinity of Love.

"Jane—you hardly know me, but I know you—your beautiful self, your beautiful soul."

I still was silent. He went on.

"Oh, I know I'm not good enough for you. I'm—I'm—a man. There have been things—you wouldn't understand. But if you'd marry me—would trust yourself to me, I'd—I'd worship you all the days of my life."

My heart leaped and was proud. My mind was sick to death in the secret alcoves where things waited at which I could not look just then. I said:

"Noel, I can't marry you. I wish I could."

"You—couldn't love me?"

I pondered that. Could I love him? How did I know? What had I known of love? A child's dream—that was Harcourt! The fascination of the snake for the bird—that was Sumner! Love, in this man's sense, was alien to me.

But my soul had conceived a great affection for him.

"I don't know!" I answered honestly.

His eyes flamed, a clear, burning blue.

"You don't say no!" he cried. He caught my hands and

drew them to his breast. "Oh, I can make you love me. Jane—Jane—for so much love there must be a little in return!"

"Noel—"

"Yes?"

"I can't marry you. I am proud and honored by your love. Believe me, I shall never forget. But you—must—I shall leave here—tomorrow—"

"Here—but not me, not my heart! You'll never leave my heart. You'll let me see you, be with you wherever you go? You'll let me have my chance?"

Let him have his chance! That meant—. What did it really mean? To him one thing, to me the very reverse. To me it meant that he would have the chance to escape, not to pursue me.

Could I, would I be strong enough to give him this chance, to make the revelation? Could I face the look of horror that would inevitably replace the exquisite look of wonder and love in his eyes? Could I?

Well, I had always, at least, been honest. Surely this man, if any, deserved honesty from me, this man who was the only one of my lovers who had taken love's name sacredly upon his lips. Before I could think twice, I committed myself:

"Come up to my room after dinner."

A look of dismay came to his face.

"I couldn't do that," he said, in the tone of explanation one uses to a child.

"Yes, you could. I have two rooms. One's a sitting-room."

My meal was brought up on a tray. After it was taken down again and before I started to dress, I surveyed my pleasant little sitting-room. A fine old chest of drawers

with a mirror above stood against one wall, a couch covered in faded cretonne with an old English print design went the length of the opposite wall. Between were three windows with a long view down a valley between two high ridges. On a small table and on the desk stood jars filled with lilacs. (Twice lilacs have played their subtle part in my life.)

It was a charming setting for—for what? For something sweet, or terrible, or both?

My maid had included one negligeé among the clothes she had packed for me. I went and looked at it hanging in the closet. It was of sheer stuff, a shining green—the color the elves love best—with a girdle of tarnished gold and a little chiffon cape edged with sable, like unusual wings. It would fall in fine lines from my shoulders, and my throat and breast would be bare.

Bare.

A great revulsion swept over me. No, no. I couldn't go through with it. I couldn't expose myself to him—couldn't see that fine face cloud over with disgust at my rottenness. I would refuse to see him—run away—out into the night.

But what good would it do? He'd probably get on my track somehow, and find me out sooner or later. Besides, there was my honesty, my one and only virtue. Let me cling to that. He—I came back to it—*he,* certainly of all men, deserved that I be honest with him.

I would be. He should see me in my *working clothes.*

So I dressed my hair with special care, rouged my cheeks and lips, powdered my throat and breast, and sprayed myself with perfume, black narcissus.

These were to tell my story.

When I slipped into the sheer gown of green, the stuff clung to my fingers, like something unclean. I shuddered.

"My God, how beautiful you are!"

I had risen to greet him, and we stood facing each other. His eyes travelled over me. I waited for the look of horror and disgust.

"But won't you catch a cold?"

I laughed. I could have cried. The careful staging had missed its effect.

His unawareness made it all the harder. Nothing but the blunt statement would do. And then what? How would this great unaware creature take the blow? Would he kill me as I was going to kill his dream of me?

I was conscious of no tremor, only in the background a slight fear.

I withdrew a few steps.

"Look at me," I said.

"I *am* looking at you. I can't do anything else."

"Look at me carefully. Don't you see?"

"See what?"

"What I am."

"The woman I love. The only woman I've ever loved, or am ever likely to love."

"No, no. Don't say that. Noel—Noel, I am *Amber* Lee. Not Jane Lee. *Amber* Lee."

"A lovely name. It suits you."

I gathered myself for the great leap.

"Noel, I am a bastard child, a divorced wife, and for the last seven years the mistress of—"

He jumped.

"Stop! Stop! You don't know what you are saying! What are you saying, in God's name?"

"I am the mistress of—" I repeated slowly and clearly, as one speaks to a child. And with stark, dreadful truth in my voice. The look of horror and disgust that I had

so dreaded had not come to his face. Only a great fear and a greater pain. He flung both hands toward me.

"Don't say it. Don't speak his name," he implored thickly. "You? *You?* I can't believe it!"

"It is true."

His face went black with congested blood.

"Divorced! Mistress! You—and I loved you—longed to marry you—"

"Yes."

He said, incredulous, and with stiffened lips:

"Why, you're a *harlot!*"

"Yes."

He came close to me, took my shoulders, shook me. The chiffon was no protection from his pitiless grip.

"Damn you—damn him!"

"There," I said, "you know now. Go. Please go."

The reaction had come. I had been keyed up to this point and no more. Enough. What was the use of more? I was utterly exhausted.

At the sound of my voice, his face suddenly changed. He dropped his hands to mine, took them, held them close.

"You're so young—you love him very much? There was some reason why you couldn't marry?" he asked pitifully, trying to find some least extenuation, trying to wrap the tattered garments of his dreams about the hideous nakedness I had revealed.

Better disillusion him completely. Better paint myself blacker than black.

"Not very young. No, I do not love him. He fascinated me. I went to him because of that. But most of all because he was rich—*rich,* do you understand?"

His hands fell from mine. He went to the couch and sat

there. The blood had left his face, his eyes were wild with pain.

"God—I don't understand—"

I was on my knees beside him. An impulse of sheer pity.

"Don't try. You can't. I had to tell you. It was the honest thing to do."

"Honest?" he mused dimly. "Honest—that's a queer word on your lips."

He looked down. His eyes traveled from my face, along my throat, my bared bosom, the lines of my kneeling body. As if he had seen me for the first time. A tigerish gleam leapt to his eyes.

His hand closed about my throat. Not hard. I shut my eyes.

Would he kill me?

The little fear came forward, grew to great proportions, faded.

It didn't matter. The reaction left me too weak to think or care.

His clasp loosened. I was free.

"Just—common. Any man's property," he said.

I opened my eyes. I saw an altered face. I read an expression I knew. I read his thoughts. "Any man's property. *Why not mine?*"

The storm of feeling, the tornado of emotion, the sirocco of passion which I had sensed, dashed back upon itself by my confession, gathered force and broke.

Not to sweep us to unimaginable heights, but to ruin, to devastate, to lay waste.

The storm!

Before I could move or speak he had taken me, flung me backward so that I lay across his knees. He bent his face to mine and kissed me. He kissed me savagely, despairingly,

as if he would murder my heart and soul with the sharp swords of his kisses, and leave nothing but the shell of flesh. He kissed me as a man condemned to die might kiss, with a desperate and angry passion. His broken whispers, a curious compound of love and rage, of shattering sorrow and scorn, passed over me as a ruinous wind passes, scorching, terrible.

Every nerve in my body was stung with a soft fire.

I lay supine, breathless under the shock. I had never before experienced this. Here were no sophisticated tricks. This was a desire unjaded, elemental.

Under it my own desire awoke as never before.

I turned a little, put my arms about his neck. I gave him kiss for kiss; I said, broken, childish:

"Noel, oh, Noel, I didn't know."

My response removed his last remnant of restraint. He was a starving man who has food and drink set before him. My whole body ached from his clasp, his lips bruised me, his tears of passion, tears of despair, were on my cheeks, they were salt to my lips.

I was tempted, tempted!

Sumner demanded fidelity. I had given it to him. But I had never before been tempted.

Suddenly, he picked me up, held me. He rose and laid me on the couch. He bent over me.

My eyes closed. Opened, sought his.

His breath caught in a sob. He turned away, staggering like a drunkard. With a crash he brought up short against the chest of drawers. There he looked blindly at his own reflection, that of an intoxicated man, lost to all but his own pitiless emotion, his eyes dark and half-closed, a little suffused with blood, his mouth loose with longing, his face dead-white, his hair damp and dishevelled.

"God!"

He came back to me. He sat down beside me and took my hand. He raised it to his lips.

"See," he said dully, with vast gentleness, "I'm—just like all the rest. You—I held so high—I could kill myself!"

He brooded and I waited. I was sick with the stemmed tide of feeling. He said:

"Nothing matters. I understand—now. No man could resist you. And you didn't know. You can't know. Women don't. Yes, I understand. Forgive me. Marry me tomorrow, be my wife, be the mother of my children."

I was stunned. Totally unprepared.

"Noel. . . ."

"Don't be afraid. I'll never reproach you. Give yourself to me. I'm strong enough to hold you."

I think he was.

The rest is vague in my memory—how I finally made him leave me.

I remember I played a little with the idea of becoming his wife. His wife, the ranch, domesticity, children. Me and—that. Amber Lee and that. I laughed, a little hysterically. I remember his look of shock, and how revelation dawned in his eyes.

The rest I have completely forgotten except that after he left I flung myself face downward on the couch and slept for hours in my chiffon gown.

And the next morning, before leaving, I left this unsigned note for him in a hand unrecognizable as mine:

"You and I, at least, have parted in cleanness, with no stain upon us except of sorrow."

Chapter XI

I BECAME determined to leave Summer Dale.

I do not know what was the passion for escape which possessed me, why or whence or toward what end it came. Perhaps Bella? No, not Bella. And not Noel Hunter. For a long time I had vaguely wished to leave Sumner Dale. To what purpose did I remain? The love that had been between us, if indeed I dared call it that, had long since vanished; the enchantment in which he held me had passed; the passion that had been our pitiful excuse for joining our lives together no longer existed. Or if it did, it was too reminiscent of the last months of my life with Harcourt to recommend itself to me. I saw Sumner very much as he was, stripped of his glamor. A clever man, a cruel man, neither romantically cruel nor unusually clever. He was always the actor, surrounding himself with the stage lights and effects of theatre mummery. Had he been a man of moderate means he would doubtless have satisfied his senses with a wife, and perhaps some little, commonplace mistress in an uptown flat. He was a sort of human legend, created by his wealth. Money buys pretty nearly everything.

If I left him as I had said to Bella, then what? I had no desire to try and earn my living. Another lover was almost the one solution. But I did not feel that I could pass, as lightly in actuality as in thought, from one to another. I have never been blind to myself. I knew that it was necessary for me, as necessary as it was for Sumner, to have some tinselled trappings with which to clothe the lay

figures of my, let us say, motives. I knew them for trappings, you understand, but they were imperative to me.

I looked back over my seven years with Sumner. If I have passed them by, those years of apprenticeship to harlotry, in comparatively few words, it is because I wish to tell my story as it seems to me. And no one intimately thinks of his or her life in minute detail. Life is lived by certain outstanding moments, not by years. I find that I have dwelt at some length on my childhood, merely because it seemed a skeleton on which to build. I find, too, that I have hardly mentioned any part Jack Evans played in those seven years. He played none. I saw him often. Sumner tolerated him, he came to us frequently as a guest, on Long Island, on the yacht. But nothing he then did or said enters into those years, stands forth as significant. His part in my life was to appear at crucial moments and then disappear as far as any importance attached to him was concerned.

Now, three days after my return from Maison Pierre and two days before Sumner was due home from his trip, Evans came to tea with me.

We talked for a time. Presently I said, abruptly:

"I'm fed up."

"Dale?"

"Yes."

He lighted a cigarette.

"What shall you do about it?"

"I haven't the remotest idea."

He looked at me curiously.

"Amber, I have known you for about twelve years now. I do not know you at all. You used to seem to me a pathetic child, then you appealed to me as a reckless, adventurous one. Lately you have been—I don't know what.

A creature of stone, with a flame at the heart, or a salamander, sitting unscathed in the flames."

"Don't try to explain me," I said, "not even to yourself. *Je suis.* That's all."

He pondered a moment. O-Saki brought tea and drinks, we sat a while quite silent. We were good friends.

"If you leave Sumner—what then?"

I yawned.

"I have enough money—for a time."

"How much?"

"Enough to support a modest family in modest comfort for a term of years. Enough to support me for a year or two without outside aid. The thing is relative. With what I have in the savings-banks and in my drawing accounts, with my jewels if I care to sell them—which I do not now—I can never starve. However, I have no intention of living along on, say, five thousand a year."

He whistled.

"As much as that?"

"Yes."

He looked at me, really with kindness.

"And you couldn't get along on it? And cut out—this?"

I smiled.

"Such advice, and from you, is really amusing. Since when did you try to play the reformer?"

"Oh, I know," he muttered, "I introduced you to Dale. With just this in mind. But it has made you so hard, Amber!"

"Did you expect it would soften me? You know Sumner Dale. You knew him then, as well as one man knows another. No one ever knows a man actually except the woman who lives with him."

"Yes, I know—"

"Don't talk cant," I said hastily, "and don't be remorseful. You did the very best you could for me. You helped me find my niche in the world. If you hadn't, some one else must have—"

"My wife's dead," he said, suddenly. "Amber, would you?"

I put up one hand, warningly.

"Come, Jack. You weren't quite willing to marry me when I left Harcourt. You must be much less willing now. Don't make any rash proposals under the nebulous idea that you are making restitution. You would loathe marrying me. . . . anything else would be out of the question. You haven't the money, my dear, for so expensive a luxury as me. Besides we are excellent friends. That alone precludes matrimony—or anything else. . . ."

He nodded, half hearing.

"I know a man—" he said, brightening a little, but I stopped him.

"Oh, Jack, Jack! Go no further! You must know a thousand. But I cannot always come to you to find me a situation. No. While we have been talking I have been thinking. If I leave Sumner I will go on my own for a time and see what offers."

When Sumner came home, he kissed me, complimented me on my appearance, gave me a check. We dined alone that evening. Afterwards, when coffee had been brought up on the roof, he stretched himself out on a couch and beckoned me to a chair beside him.

"You didn't write me how you enjoyed your rustication. Wires say nothing. Did you meet anyone interesting?"

"No one who could interest you."

He was unconcerned. He said:

"So you had visitors while I was away?"

"It is not permitted?"

"Certainly. O-Saki tells me Evans was here. That's all right. Every woman must have a tame cat around. He also tells me you received a 'lady.' He *said* lady. From his description she is not one that I have hitherto met. Sounds like an inferior dressmaker with a husband who drinks."

"It was a woman I had known as a child," I said speaking quietly. "I met her by chance on the street. I asked her to come in, and she did. We talked for an hour or so."

"How charming! An apparition of your girlhood. Did she inquire for your guardian?"

"She did not. She knows quite well who and what you are. What I am. She was merely being kind and overcoming a number of scruples when she came."

"A lesson for her," he murmured, lazily, and then I said nothing but sat straight up beside him with my hands in my lap, he murmured:

"You are lovely in purple. You keep your looks very well. It is unusual to find a woman, with all the means of artificial stimulants at her finger tips, wise enough to shun drugs or drink or worse. It has paid you, my dear."

I was still silent. He went on.

"I have a plan to set before you. I shall not open Carcasonne this summer. I am tired of the place. I have put it in the hands of dealers. I wish to take the big yacht out —on a long trip, probably around the world. And I shall take a party with me."

He named the party. I was dumb with amazement. Two married couples, so-called society people, with money and good names in back of them, two single men whom I had met, and a girl of whom I had heard.

"Where do I come in?" I asked. "Is this my congé."

"Not at all. You have lived with me seven years, Amber,

and I have never had a woman annoy me less. You never get on my nerves. To be sure, there have been times when you made scenes. But those times are past. As a matter of fact, I was in tune with them when they occurred, and they pleased me. Now, we have both settled down. I know you have made a dignified hostess in my somewhat irregular home, I know that you have been faithful to me. I am getting old, I am reaching an age when a man is apt to make a foolish marriage. I would be very likely to go the way of all flesh and marry some eighteen-year-old creature, for variety and a sentimental idea of ending my days in peace. It would be far from peace. Therefore, I have been thinking while I was away from you. We understand each other, you and I. I need you as, let us say, a protection. I am perfectly willing, more than that, I am anxious to marry you. We can call the yachting trip our honeymoon."

"Marry me?"

"Yes. You had given up hoping?"

Oh, surely a more despicable object never crawled belly down on the clean, revolted earth. I rose to my feet.

"I shall not marry you!"

"No? Then," he said, regretfully, "we must part. I have made my plans for this voyage. The Rogers, the Randalls, are quite respectable people. You have never met them, I think? No, of course not. And you could meet them only in one rôle, that, namely, of my legally wedded wife."

I looked down at him as he lay there, raised on one elbow, his actor's face masked, as usual, the pale eyes smiling quietly.

"But they must have heard about me. Why should they be willing to meet me—even as your wife."

"The ceremony is a whitewasher, my dear. Today, the two ladies would pass you by with averted heads. Tomorrow

they would exchange dressmakers' addresses with you. They *know*. But they will forget they ever knew. Women are like that."

"Who is the girl?" I asked, brusquely.

"Lilly Lawrence. You must have heard of her. She is new to New York, the ingenue in that play of Hurburt's. She is like something you read about. Poor but proud. Old Southern family, much decayed. She has been on the stage only two years. Her mother traveled with her until recently when, having died, she was no longer able to travel on this sphere. Miss Lawrence is that rare thing, a perfectly innocent girl, making her living at the least innocent of trades. I would like very much to give her this trip as my guest, for the summer at least. When it is over, she could return to New York if she wished, as we would touch at all the big ports and some not so big. Naturally she would feel more inclined to accept my invitation if Mrs. Dale were there to make her feel comfortable."

I understood. I was to play the gracious wife, the hostess, chaperone to the poor little creature. Sumner was to play, probably, the misunderstood husband, the man with a past who only needed the hand of a good woman to guide him. He had chosen well when he chose me to form a background for his play, to be Chorus as it were. He knew my history would come to the girl's ears and revolt her. She might even find it in her heart to pity him as the victim of an evil woman. Little by little, with his dreadful knowledge of women to guide him, he would break down her barriers, devastate her defences.

I cried out:

"At what are you asking me to connive?"

He raised his eyebrows slightly.

"I assure you, nothing. You have a melodramatic mind."

"The girl attracts you?"

"Yes."

"Why don't you marry her?"

"My dear Amber, nothing would tire me more," he said, closing his small eyes wearily. "As the bridegroom of a twenty-year-old I would not shine to advantage. For a time, yes. Afterwards, what? Recall, my dear, that I am fifty-two. Lilly is an unformed creature. She might easily degenerate into a model wife. That would terrify me. On the other hand, if she has, as I feel, certain slumbering possibilities for the vitalities of life—twenty and fifty-three—another scandal—another divorce—more alimony—or a complacent husband and a young whipper-snapper under foot, some impecunious friend of her childhood? Oh, no!

He could not have spoken more plainly. Sally Powers had developed in him that last resort of the debauched, a taste for innocence. But Sally was a mere step on the road. Her innocence, that of a bride of six months, was hardly innocence. She was simply a young woman married to a normal man, with a mind that craved excitement and abnormalities. This Lilly girl, as I saw her, was different. Probably a very lovely young person, flowering from the dung-heap of the theatre. The very contrast between her and her surroundings must have moved Sumner to his resolve, quickened his desires. But he must be protected. He would never wish to marry her. He must be allowed to play with her and dismiss her when he was tired. 'I would marry you, but I am not free.' With those words a man may win a woman and then cast her off. I was to play safety belt for the flight.

"Well?" He was regarding me, as I still stood motionless. "Have you considered?"

"Yes. I will not marry you, Sumner."

It was the end. I was glad to think I had so righteous

an excuse for leaving him. I could almost think of myself as a martyr, of his offer as a temptation. I knew that if he married me he would allow me comparative freedom in exchange for his own. He would not divorce me. I would have the honor, in the probable trend of things, of being his widow. Fidelity, he would insist upon, men of his type being no different from other men on that point. I would simply have to wear good clothes, lovely jewels, and preside over his residences, fixed and floating. Incidentally, I would have to cloak his fancies—fancies that were becoming dangerous —as long as they lasted.

The temptation in it was the monetary security it promised and the fact that I might look forward to wearing weeds.

I had been looking for an excuse to escape. Now that I had it, I saved my face—perhaps.

"I am sorry. You have been very good to me. . . . We will part friends?"

"How unlike you, Amber, to be banal. No man and woman who have been lovers part friends. But we will at least part without hostility. I shall have to make other arrangements."

And that was all. Sumner left within a day to go to the shipyard where the big yacht waited. I packed my things, dismissed Marie, and left the apartment on lower Fifth Avenue. I took rooms in a quiet hotel uptown, left my trunks in them, and set out alone for a little place I knew in the Blue Ridge mountains. I would stay there for a time—and make my plans.

When I returned to New York, Sumner had sailed for Europe. With him went his younger son, who was still unmarried, and the others of the party, almost as he had planned it.

Chapter XII

IT SEEMED strange to be *free*. I took a small apartment on the East Side, which was not then as fashionable a section as now, and sat down, figuratively, with my chin in my hands, to think things out. I could now write of my "reform" to father. He could go away somewhere, he and I. But no. Wherever we went my story would follow me, I would read it written in the veriest stranger's eyes, and see father flinch from the knowledge that all the world knew. I would live with him, day after day, knowing. . . . At first I might be a little happy, a little rested . . . but there would come a day. . . . No, I could not write to father.

However, now was the moment in which I might make my choice. I could go straight or I could take the other way, the familiar way. If I elected to lead a decent life, I had the money to do it, but I must be careful, count my dollars, and I could no longer welter in French perfumes, in chiffon underwear, in frocks that cost half a thousand dollars a piece. And I must get something to do. I could never just live on—three meals a day, a trip in the summer. I would have to drop all the friends I had made, such as they were. I would hardly dare make new ones for fear of discovery.

The choice was in my hands.

I might try and condone or gloss over my life after I divorced Harcourt by easy phrases, "I drifted into it," "I was driven to it by fear of poverty, loss of employment,"

etc., etc. But now I had not even such excuses, feeble as they were. I had a sum that approximated one hundred thousand dollars. I had jewelry that I could sell. On this amount I could live for the rest of my life in moderate comfort—if I wished.

Figuratively, also, I rose up and cast the problem from me. I would let things take their course. Meantime, I would live as well as I had grown accustomed to living and I was free as air. No man had the key to my little flat, my bedroom was my own, my goings out and comings in were not questioned. I might eat what I fancied, drink what I wished, get up and go to bed when it pleased me, and there was not a soul on earth who need be consulted. As for men—or a man—to the devil with them all—until I needed them again.

Of course I met people wherever I went, people who had known Sumner and me. They were all curious. I would not gratify their curiosity. If I had told any of them that Sumner Dale had asked me to marry him and I had refused, they would have laughed in my face. I comforted myself with the solacing thought that I was not going to tell anyone, because it was my affair and no one else's. It was not likely that Sumner would tell. This last, I knew, was futile self-deception. It was because I should never be believed that I was not going to tell. Very well, let them think what they wanted to think—which is always the worst in such a case—let them think he had tired of me—that was true enough—and told me to go elsewhere.

I amused myself as best I could. It was summer, and summer in New York is not exciting. But I rather liked it. I began to read a great deal and found that the study of jewels and costumes interested me. I often went to the library and spent hours over old musty books. I began to

have a passion for jewels as art and not as ornament. I planned that if ever I should have a great deal of money at my disposal I would make a wonderful collection of ancient and marvelous gems. I read the autobiography of that nonchalant, pseudo-pious braggart and sinner, Benvenuto Cellini, and would have sold my soul for some of the things he tells of in that amazing book, the button for the priest's cope of the long dead Pope, the salt-cellar now in Vienna, which represents Earth and Sea, the tinted diamond.

I dreamed over these things. I dreamed also of more personal jewelry, of pearls like roc's eggs, and of a turban sewn solid with gems, of bracelets, row on row of them. And laughed myself awake wondering if by any chance I had for a moment seriously considered life on five thousand a year.

Lottie Vayne, whose distressful visions had not yet been realized, was living in Great Neck. I went there for a week-end and found a party of people almost all of whom I knew. It was midsummer and we lay around on the great shady verandahs and drank cool things in tall, frosted glasses. There were half a dozen uninteresting men with stupendous thirsts, three or four girls, and old Grossman, Lottie's lover, a fat, oily Jew with magnificent eyes. "Frank," of whom she had complained long ago at Carcassonne, was gone the way of women's virtue and had been replaced, long since, by a more generous successor. Lottie confided in me that she had done "very well" and that the "old people" in Ohio were innocently reaping the wages of sin.

"I told them I won a beauty contest!" she said with an impish smile on her dark face. "And so I did. My dear old boy has a hole in his pocket as far as I am concerned. He sheds small change all over the place. Well, it's an easy

life," she murmured, "and truly, Amber, don't laugh, but I'm awfully fond of Sol. He's a white Jew."

I shuddered a little. Grossman seemed far from "white" to me; he looked unwashed. But Lottie was not fastidious, I suppose, and she was quite correct in saying he was good to her. He gave her everything on earth, and only regretted that she would not "screen well," for he was making an enormous amount of money in the moving pictures, then a young industry, and would have been happy to have seen his "leedle girl" shine, star-like, on every screen in the country. She was too old to begin on the screen, was Lottie, although still in her early thirties. But Sol was too chivalrous to put it that way.

It was at this house-party that I first heard the name of Mort Dunne.

They were at supper on the porch, some five or six of the men and two of the girls. I was sitting nearby with Grossman and Lottie, and heard:

"—worth a hundred millions, if a cent." "Soft spot in his heart for the girls." "What happened between him and Florrie Wales?" "They say—" And again and again the name, "Mort Dunne."

"Who's this Dunne man?" I asked Sol.

He laughed his fat, comfortable laugh, and stroked Lottie's smooth black head with his pudgy manicured fingers, as she sat beside him on the couch.

"A new millionaire. I know him, rich and little and thin, not rich and fat and big, like me. I have a care Lottie shouldn't meet him. All the girls love Dunne, he is *so* polite! A perfect gentleman. He is an oil man, out West, and has made much money. There will be more. He bought up great concessions in Mexico and needs only the older men's money to back him, to build and to dig and to find the good,

rich oil. He comes to New York to live, now. He has a wife who is very anxious to be in society. He is not in *her* society very much," said old Sol, laughing at his own joke.

I said nothing. I had no plans, but in the back of my head I was curious.

I did not meet Mort Dunne until that fall. I heard of him often in the meantime. He had bought a place in Newport, and Mrs. Dunne was lampooned in the society-gossip papers, Town Topics held its sides at her—her efforts to break in, and her jewels, her almost always absent husband. There was a child, a girl, too young to be of any use as a wedge with the younger set. Of Dunne himself the papers knew very little. He spent a good deal of time in the West; when East he was much on board his yacht, the "Winsome Lass," and seemed more of a legend than a man.

When I finally met him it was through Sol Grossman. I had gone to Sol's office to consult him about investing some of my money in his moving-picture company stock, and as I was about to leave Mr. Dunne was announced. I sat still and made no move to go. Sol looked at me curiously.

"So!"

He had his secretary show Dunne in. Introduced us.

Mort Dunne was a small man, of slight build with thick grey hair and a young face. He *was* young. He was only forty when I met him. He had a pleasant, direct manner and something extraordinarily gentle about him. I liked him at once, and this fact impressed me. I had never *liked* a man. Jack Evans, yes, but that was an accustomed fondness, such as one has for a domestic pet, rather than a straightforward liking. But this man I liked.

He had a soft voice, refused the cigar that Sol offered him, remarked that as Sol was busy he would look in again. He

had no business to discuss, had merely wanted to see if Sol would lunch with him.

Sol, looking benevolent, rubbed his hands.

"We lunch together, you and I, Miss Lee and Lottie. I 'phone Lottie now, she will meet us at Delmonico's."

"I wanted to suggest just that," said Dunne, smiling.

Lottie joined us, her eyes round. I wondered why Sol was suddenly not fearful at having her meet the dangerously rich Westerner. But Sol was shrewd.

The conversation was general. When luncheon was over the two men went back to Sol's office, and Lottie and I were left to our own devices. As we parted, Mr. Dunne said to me, with odd diffidence:

"I would like to see you again, Miss Lee. Is it permitted that I call?"

I smiled down into his eyes, I was taller than he by an inch or so.

"Of course." I gave him my address and telephone number. "I would be glad to see you."

I knew, of course, that he had been able to place me in my proper category when he heard Sol include Lottie in the luncheon party. Otherwise he might have thought me a—moderately—innocent young woman looking for a screen engagement, or merely dropping in to wish old Grossman good morning. And I was convinced that he now had gone with Sol, simply in order to acquaint himself with the details of my mode of living, past and present.

Lottie and I went to a matinée. Between the acts she discoursed on Dunne.

"Too soft for my taste," she said, biting into a chocolate. "But rich as all get out."

"Sol says he hasn't been around town more than three years, not so's any one would know him, I mean, and he's

had half a dozen girls—backed some others, one actress and one dressmaker. But nothing lasts long with him. He wants something different, I guess. His wife weighs a ton or two, and he never sees her, hardly. He's a funny sketch, don't you think? Sorter little and lost? And did you notice that he didn't drink? Never does, they say. Well, everyone to their own taste. If he don't drink and don't smoke and don't swear, like I hear, you can bet on it that the women go strong with him."

I was betting on it. I had seen his eyes. And I found them wistful and eager, what Lottie had meant by "little and lost" I suppose.

He telephoned me that evening, and I went to dinner with him the next day. He was almost as quiet as I am inclined to be, and the conversation was carried on by fits and starts. But I liked him even more. There was something very appealing about him. I knew as I watched him sitting there at the little table in the Ritz that he was a weak man in the hands of a woman, no matter how strong a man he might be in finance.

He told me a little about himself.

"I'm self-made," he said with a smile. "Began with a hardware shop back home. The oil boom was later. I married very young, a girl I had always known. She worked with me, we saved, I bought land, the oil was there. It seems funny," he mused, "all in twenty years."

I saw him a good deal, once or twice he left town to be with his family at Hot Springs, another time he was West, and once made a flying trip to England. But whenever he was in New York, he was with me. He was very formal, very courteous, very unlike any other man I had ever known. I found myself wishing I could love him. He would have been such a safe person for a woman to love. He was a man

who needed love, who would have been himself, released and at peace, under it. But I could not love him. Nothing in him compelled or drew me. I liked him, I felt a certain tenderness toward him, I was happy to be with him, and knew after I had seen him twice that if he should ask me to be his mistress I would consent. In no way did he revolt me. It would be easy to live with such a man. As for passion, I was done with that. Or, rather, love lay dead in me for the time being. Seven years of Sumner Dale had numbed, if not killed it. But affection I could give Mort Dunne and fidelity. I wondered if he cared for me, but beyond wishing to be in my company he had made no sign.

One day, in the early winter, while we were sitting in his closed car, driving home from a long luncheon hour in Westchester, he said:

"Miss Lee."

"Why not Amber?"

"Amber. How long have we known each other?"

"Three months."

After a minute, during which I looked out of the car window and held my breath, he was such a quiet man—one never knew—he said:

"When I first saw you, I made up my mind. Grossman told me something about you. Then Morton."

I turned quickly, disagreeably surprised.

"James—James Morton?"

"Yes. We come from the same town in the West. He is older, of course, but we have always been friends."

"If he has said anything," I remarked, "it can't have been flattering."

"You mean, he would be bitter against you, on his daughter's account? Why, no," he went on slowly, "he was very fair. Spoke of your extreme youth when you married young

Allan. He seemed to regret—for your sake—rather than otherwise."

After a pause, I said:

"Well, that was very long ago. In the interim there was Sumner Dale, as I suppose you know."

"Yes, I know. You were a faithful—*friend*—to Dale. Will you be that to me, Amber?"

I caught back an exclamation, Victory! I considered this quiet, reserved man—how much I liked him, his great means, his weakness for women—and I triumphed. It seemed a long, long time since I had speculated on taking the narrow course! Here, if my cards were rightly played was security, and security that would extend into my old age.

But I was curious.

"Do you love me?" I asked him, baldly.

He looked at me. A little color came into his face.

"I have always loved—beauty," he said. "As a boy in the hardware shop, dreaming dreams. And I need what a woman can give me. I will speak of my life to you this once and no more. I loved my wife, Amber. She was a lovely girl, a good girl, and we worked up together. But then the money came and we drifted apart. We would never separate, I owe her too much, and there is the child. But I am lonely. And there have been women, but none has satisfied me. I want something a little more than merely the fidelity which insures me my physical safety. And I know I have found it in you. You are a very beautiful woman, you are quiet, you are educated. I want a woman I can read with, talk with, be at peace with. . . . I abhor scenes. . . ."

I had a momentary picture of the "other women" harrassing him, hurting him, with their easy tempers and their

easy reconciliations. I nodded, reflectively. If this were the return he demanded for his money: white skin and red hair, fidelity, and a place to come to when he was tired and needed soft words and cheering, it was a simple exchange. I put my hand over his.

"I like you, Mort. Very well."

You see, there was nothing sentimental about it.

The arrangements were made very soon. I moved to a larger apartment, one on Riverside Drive, and it was decorated for me by a Fifth Avenue firm. Mort paid monthly into my account at the bank a very large sum of money. On that I was to dress and run my house. It was more than ample. On the other hand the arrangement was quite different from the one Sumner had made with me. With Mort, my charge accounts were paid by myself. He never saw a bill. If I needed more money he gave it to me. I paid my rent, everything was in my name. In no way was he connected with anything I might choose to buy. It was his money, of course, but he made no appearance in any transaction. Neither did he make his home with me. I was, to all appearances, a single woman, using my stage name of Lee, and living alone. I had visitors, one frequently, that was all. Whole weeks would pass without my seeing him. Once he wired me to sail for Paris where he would join me, as he was called to England on business. I sailed alone and, at his request, without a maid. When I arrived in Paris I went to the hotel he had designated and was there for a week before he came. He was very cautious, not for his own sake, not even for his wife's, but for the sake of his little daughter. We were together abroad for some time, yet never traveled on the same trains or by the same motors. We merely "met," and I stayed over some two weeks after he had sailed for home.

I found the life much to my liking. I could almost believe that I was a free woman. I had so little demands on me. Mort wished only that I should look charming and be pleasant, should make a transient home for him on his flights of passage. He had no real sensuality, merely a sort of sensuousness, and a rather diffident passion. We were better friends than lovers. He might have been aroused to higher flights in our love passages had he awakened anything in me. He did not. I was passive and amiable, that was all. I did not even pretend. In the beginning, I did pretend, but I soon found that it disconcerted him and that he did not like it. It was not what he wanted. He wanted passivity. He wanted fidelity. He wanted soothing and release; and I was able to give them to him. He soon became extraordinarily attached to me, almost I think as a man becomes attached to a comfortable house-jacket. Yet he was very proud of my appearance. And he gave me many jewels, finer than those I had had from Sumner. I had a square-cut diamond and a square-cut emerald, two immense and remarkable rings, which were the envy of every woman I knew. And I had more pearls, pearls to my knees, as I had wished as a child. One winter, meeting Lottie Vayne wrapped to her ears in sables, I mentioned it to Mort. Two days later I had the finest sable coat in New York. He seemed to feel that as long as I must be bought, no price could be too high.

I never saw Mort Dunne in a temper. I never heard him curse. He had a way of simply saying "No" when a thing did not meet with his approval. As I valued my situation I did not cross him. I fancied that the other women had said *Yes* when he said *No* and had tried on him all their pretty petulances and finally their unlovely scenes. It had disgusted him. So I learned to smile and say "very well,"

and sooner or later in a roundabout way I got what I wanted, or the refusal was made up to me.

I became an excellent housekeeper. Mother must have inculcated it in me. I lived well, but not in a spendthrift way. I saved. I sold some of the minor jewelry and had imitations made. With so many real and important jewels I could afford to wear good paste, and it passed unnoticed. I became about the best-dressed woman of the demi-monde in New York. I never over-dressed, and I did not buy what I did not need. My bank accounts grew, my investments prospered. In a few years if I wished I could break away from that sort of life and lead one of my own, in perfect comfort and luxury. I often wondered if I would do this. Down in my heart I thought not. I had grown dependent on men in a curious way. Not so much for the gratification of my senses as a stimulant. I needed a man around, wanted the feel of molding the clay of their passion between my slender hands, and making of it figures of my will.

There was no scandal. Mort Dunne went out so little in society that people hardly knew him by sight. In the morganatic circles everything was known and discussed, but that was inevitable and did not matter. We, together, went out very seldom in any circle. We stayed at home a good deal, read, played cards with one or two people, like Lottie and Grossman, for instance; and I started again to sing and to brush up my piano and organ playing. My small gifts were rusty from disuse. Mort left me so much to myself that I found time heavy on my hands. I had a singing master come to the apartment, an organist, a French teacher. I found that I must be occupied. Mort did not like me to have any close intimacies with the only kind of woman who would wish to be intimate with me. So I was very much alone.

Chapter XIII

TWO years of this. Little by little I was becoming bored. I had never been bored with Sumner, and yet, generally speaking, my life with Mort was more to my taste. But with Sumner one lived more or less keyed up all of the time.

During this period I saw him at a distance several times. Once when I was lunching alone at Sherry's he came in, and made a move toward my table. He looked older, tired. I shook my head slightly, and he turned and left the room. I knew that if ever any one saw me speaking to him and reported it to Mort, things might be made quietly unpleasant for me. Yet in a way I regretted my wisdom; I should rather have liked to speak to him.

Seven years—and now, after some two years and a half of life without Sumner I had come to think of him with a mild curiosity. I wondered what he had been doing. Lilly Lawrence, for instance. I had heard, indirectly, that she had gone on the yachting trip, had returned earlier than expected, and had gone back unobtrusively to the stage. I had seen her several times in her plays. A fragile, charming creature with a voice that was "broken music." It was borne in upon me that whatever Sumner's game with her had been, he had lost it. I fancy she left the yacht as soon as the first irregular word was spoken. I was forced to admire her. She seemed wrapped up in her profession, seemed to take it seriously, as an art—that overworked, generally falsified attitude of the player toward the theatre—and to live for

nothing else. Most of the actresses I had known seemed to choose that mode of employment as a stepping stone toward other heights—or depths—seemed to consider the stage merely as a frame for their personal charms. Lilly Lawrence was different. If her ambition was star-dom, it was star-dom through the medium of public acclaim and hard work. Had she surrendered to Sumner it is possible that he would have allowed her to continue on the stage and even bought rapid advancement for her—her name over a theatre. But he had failed. What the story was back of it all, no one would ever know.

When I saw Sumner in Sherry's, I found myself looking at him with interest and indifference and yet, underlying it all, a certain excitement. I had no sense that I had ever belonged to him, in any way. It was my first experience of seeing, in a casual man strolling past me, one who had been my lover, to whom I was known, who was known to me, in all the terrible intimacies of life together. I had never seen Harcourt since I had divorced him; this was my first glimpse of his successor. It was a strange feeling. I kept telling myself all the time that I should have memories—sensations—shames—I don't know what. But I had not. Merely, as I have said, the curiosity, the interest and indifference, the excitement, contradictory emotions enough.

It was not until luncheon was over and I had gone home that I began to remember Sumner—really *remember*.

A day or so later he called me up. Mort was not in town, not liable to be. Perhaps Sumner knew.

He gave his name to the maid who answered the ring. It struck me afterwards as a daring thing to do. Perhaps he realized that Mort Dunne, unlike himself, was not the type of man who employed servants to watch his women.

I went to the 'phone when the maid told me. There was

no use not going. I would always wonder what he wanted, fret myself into a fever of speculation.

Our conversation was not long, and at first rather formal. He inquired for my health, said he heard I had moved, wondered if I were happy. He himself had been on the yacht for over a year, had brought her to San Francisco from the Orient, and had then remained in California. He was only recently back in town and had seen Jack Evans. He understood I no longer saw Jack?

That was quite true, I told him. After a little further talk it occurred to me to find out what he really wanted.

"What is it that you really wish to say to me, Sumner?"

"How clever you are! But why suspect me of ulterior motives?"

"You never had any other kind."

After a minute during which his laughter came plainly to me he said:

"Why shouldn't I want to talk to you? You were unkind in Sherry's—or was it caution? After all, we parted good friends."

"You once denied that," I cut in on him, "and gave your reasons."

"Well—how good your memory is!—let us say we parted on excellent terms. You are looking very lovely, Amber. I like your clothes, I liked that little sable cap, and your coat is magnificent."

"Thank you."

Presently, after a silence in which the wire buzzed with alien voices, he said:

"I am thinking of investing in oil lands."

It came to me then that I had heard, through Lottie Vayne, that Sumner had been steadily losing money in

unfortunate investments. His means were inherited, loss meant much to him. I saw now why he had 'phoned.

"How interesting," I said. "But I am afraid I cannot give you any information, if that is what you are looking for."

I hung up the instrument in the middle of a smooth protest. It seemed terrible to me that he should come to me for that purpose. To try and discover from a discarded mistress the best way of making capital out of the exploits of her new lover . . . I was quite sick with anger.

He never tried to speak to me again. He goes, now, quite out of the picture. He died, years later, in some woman's apartment. Died unskillfully, which must have annoyed him. He was an empty bladder of a man, in the last analysis, but he left his mark on me.

Yes. As I have said, I was getting bored. It occurred to me as the months ebbed that Mort Dunne was buying in me a sort of domesticity. He looked to me for the qualities that most American men wish in a wife. Quiet, home-staying qualities, embracing affection, comfort, good meals, a well-run house, sympathy, and not too much disturbing emotion. Men don't seem to like that in their *wives*. These were all the things that Mrs. Dunne had once given him, and gave no longer now that the society bee buzzed in her bonnet and money had gone suddenly to her head. It struck me as humorous that he should seek in a mistress what he had lost in a wife.

But I was bored. The very things that had first recommended him to me, the things I looked on as auguries of safe harborage after my stormy passage with Sumner, began to irritate me. Mort's quietness, his low voice, his lack of all the minor vices. I always knew where I was at, with him. After two years and more of it, it palled.

I began to look for distraction. Fidelity was the one

thing that Mort absolutely demanded of me, and I must say that even for the stimulation of running a risk, any deviation from that course did not appeal to me. My studies, my books, my theatre and opera-going, my traveling, none of these filled an imperative need in me. Women friends I had few, Lottie Vayne I was fond of, knew as well as any; but she was a mentally undeveloped creature, shrewd as a street urchin, no more. I was conscious of the devastating emptiness of my days. Had I wished to take a secret lover, as many women of my stamp do, I would have chosen at that moment a man uneducated, virile, brutal, one who would have beaten me, to whom I must cringe, whom I must pay for peace. It horrified me to realize that I had sunk so low as to contemplate such an action calmly and acknowledge that it would be natural to me to hunt for such a man, if I had the desire. Fortunately I had not.

Unable to do anything that would amuse and occupy me, I turned my attention to money. More money. Investments. Gilt-edged securities. And then I began, very quietly and delicately, to urge Mort to give me a house.

At first he was indifferent. Then as I began to influence him more by my arguments, hinting that he must be tired of an apartment so like thousands of others, that to a house where he was master he could bring any friends who cared to visit him, he became fired with the idea. We discussed a country house, but in the back of my mind I was figuring that a country house would be harder to get rid of than one in the city, and would command a sacrifice price only. At last Mort decided, and thought the decision emanated from himself, that a house in the Fifties and off the Avenue might be the solution.

Once he had made up his mind he was a whirlwind for action. In a few months he had the house. But it did

not please him. So he had it partially torn out and rebuilt, had it equipped with suites and conservatories, a little motion-picture theatre, an electric pipe organ, and a hundred smaller improvements. It was a beautiful thing when it was finished, and I adored it. It was a jewel of a house in its completeness, but a rather large jewel. It cost him three hundred thousand dollars, exclusive of the marvelous furnishings.

One day when we had been to see it and had come back to the apartment together, he sat for a while in deep thought. He had had nothing to do with appearing as owner as far as decorators and the like were concerned. I did all that. We went together to the house only after working hours.

"Amber," he said, "I am going to give you the house. It is to be yours. To live in all your life, to sell, to do with as you please. You have been very good to me. No other woman could hold me as you hold me. I hope that you will always wish to stay with me. I can see no reason why you should ever leave me unless you fall in love with another man. And I think you are too wise for that. You are a cold woman, and for the sake of a little fleeting excitement you would surely not wish to give up—all this—our pleasant life together, our quiet life. I do not make many demands on you—"

"Indeed, you do not," I told him, touched suddenly by his wistfulness.

"You shall have the house," he said, firmly, as if deciding a question in himself. "And I shall never take it away from you. I mean that I shall never try to influence you to leave it. I give you my word."

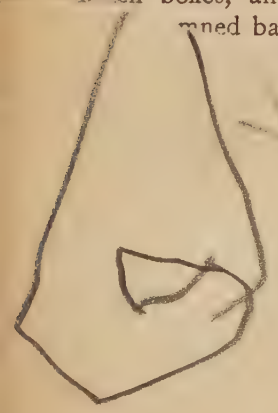
I kissed him. I had made my best investment.

When the house was completed the deeds, made out in my name, were given me and I went to live in it, with a

staff of carefully selected servants, a housekeeper, a personal maid, the one I had had for a year or more, an Austrian girl named Anna, two dogs and an Angora cat. A motor was kept at a nearby garage. Everything, in fact, save a social secretary. I had then no need of one, thought, amused, that I never should have. Later, I found that even social secretaries and all they stood for were not beyond the realization of my ambitions.

The organ alone was worth a small fortune, the draperies, the hangings, the furniture in that house were marvels each in their way. Sol, coming to me on the occasion of a housewarming, a small affair at which Mort appeared dimly in the background and perfectly acted the guest, Sol Grossman was perplexed and ill at ease.

"I'm afraid to sit down in it," he confided to me. "You can't pick up a cigarette box without it should be real tortoise shell and break in your hands. The bells and the match boxes, all the same. There ain't a room in the



ned barn where a man can take off his coat and
table. Did he give you the house,
e enough. Besides, all the little
it—it could be more *gemütlich!*"
ith envy.
our cards," she said when she and
i my dressing-room, the most per-
f its kind I have ever seen. "You're
don't make any slips. Still—" and
ch her bright, black eyes—"still, I
ge Sol."
a little for her power of enveloping

with glamor and a certain unbelievable romance the fat elderly Jew whom she had actually called "papa."

Later I learned that Mort had given his wife a house in Palm Beach.

Faithful to the Biblical injunction, he did not let his left hand know what his right hand was doing; but he was equally fair and generous with both hands. During the winter season he stayed, perforce, at Palm Beach with his family. He wrote me often, perfectly formal letters, not a word in which could have been twisted into any sort of double meaning. I did not write to him at all. We arranged always that if anything happened I was to wire him in a code we had, wires which would read like business communications. He was a clever man, not subtle or dazzling, but clever in the painstaking way that means genius.

We had been together four years. The house had been mine a year. I was a little over thirty-three years old. Mort had been at Palm Beach, was to stay another week, when I had a wire from him. It told me merely that he had to come home on business and would telephone when he arrived.

When he 'phoned it was merely to ask me to be alone.

There was little need of the precaution. Eight or nine women had been in for bridge and were leaving even then.

When he came I saw that he looked ill and worried. He had lost weight, there was a definite white in the even gray of his hair.

We had dinner first, then went to the library for coffee. After we had talked a little about nothing very much, after the man servant had cleared away and I had lighted a cigarette, he leaned forward.

"Amber . . . I'm in difficulties."

"Tell me," I said.

"First of all—at Palm Beach—there was a woman. I knew her before I knew you. Not since. I believe she has been out of the country. She had been provided for, you understand. She was with another woman, no men. Of course as soon as she found I was there with my wife, in our house, she tried to make things difficult. A species of blackmail. My God," he said, and I started; it was the first time I had ever heard him say it. "My daughter was with me! My *daughter!*"

"What happened?" I asked, pitying him somewhat.

"Well—nothing. I knew a man there, a clever lawyer. He has helped me before. She was induced to leave. But if my wife had ever learned! I had to think of you, too, Amber. It would have been so easy, from that first knowledge, to follow the trail right here to this door." He paused, then said again, "this door," in a manner curiously agitated.

"Is that all?"

"No."

I threw away my cigarette. Lit another. I was wearing cloth-of-gold that night, I remember, and had a great black fan beside me. It was winter, but the fan was part of the costume, the sticks were inlaid with gold.

"I've never told you much about my business," he said, abruptly. "It didn't seem to fit into our story. You knew merely that I am what is called an oil man, that I had apparently unlimited means. So I have, in a way. But several years ago I managed to get some Mexican oil land concessions, hundreds of thousands of acres. If the thing worked out I planned to retire, I have a dozen minor interests, you know, factories, railroads, am a director in more things than I can count, more concerns and companies. But this Mexican business was to be the climax. In order to develop the property properly, to keep the wheels of

diplomacy greased, I needed a tremendous amount of cash. Most of that has been raised, the work is going on. Cash I do not possess in the sense of many millions. My money is greatly tied up. If I were to withdraw it from the various side industries of mine they would go smash, and what I have labored for would go down with them. My original oil interests enable me to live on the scale I do. To run this establishment—and the others. Even were I to sacrifice all this, my personal means, so to speak, it would be a drop in the bucket. So the money for this project has been provided by other men, big men, older men, men longer in the game than I, and, by safe conservative banks. Now a situation has arisen for which more money is needed, and at once, more than I can lay hands on—personally. The banks must come to my rescue. There is one bank in New York that can save the situation. They have considered it. And they have—practically, or with reservations—refused.

"Why?"

I was suddenly breathless, no longer bored. I knew a crisis had come. I welcomed it.

"The president of the bank," he said, simply, "lives three doors from this house. A director a little further on; two other directors a stone's throw away on Fifth Avenue."

"But why . . ."

I broke off. I knew why.

"Everything gets to these men," he said wearily. "Frankly, they do not like the idea of having their wives and children on the same street—with—oh, it is all absurd," he broke out. "And it is simply an excuse. They know as well as I that the women they permit their families to meet in so-called good society every day of the year are not— But that is how they put it. It really boils down to this. They

think me reckless, they believe me a spendthrift, they will not trust me . . . unless . . ."

"Unless what?"

"Unless you are no longer in the picture, my dear," he answered.

I nodded. I saw the point. A man capable of spending half-millions for a house in which to keep a notorious woman was not a man whom conservative directors would trust. As for their wives—no doubt the house *had* irritated them, it was by far the handsomest within blocks; no doubt they had spoken a wifely word, each of them. And it was not as if Mort Dunne had been a rich man for generations. That would have been different. People—and banks—shut their eyes to the indiscretions of a man whose grandfather has made his first fortune. Mort was indeed self-made. Twenty years ago it had been a hardware shop. Doubtless laying in new stock had been a risk for that little man then. Now he was at the peak and, it seemed, bound for the down-grade.

"What shall you do?" I asked him.

But I knew.

He didn't answer me, not directly. He said instead the most amazing thing I have ever had said to me.

"If only we loved each other, Amber!"

I am glad he paid me the compliment of being honest, of relying on my return honesty. He couldn't have risked such a speech to the other women, they would have been at him, worrying him with their little lies, as dogs worry a kill. "But we do!" "How can you!" And all the rest.

I nodded again. If only we did. Suddenly I saw him clear, that little man. It was, after all, love he had wanted. Not just physical safety. Not just domesticity, left-handed. Not just peace and freedom from women greedy for scenes. Love! And he couldn't love—again. Or couldn't love me.

Nor I him. If we had, I think he would have snapped his fingers at the bank directors, started all over again. After all the wife, even the girl, didn't matter, or wouldn't have mattered. He was a real Romantic, down deep. But because he was protecting himself against thinking himself into love he kept them both in the foreground of his mind, they were his excuses for caution.

"What do you want me to do, dear?" I asked him.

He looked at me. His eyes pleaded. I never knew just for what.

"I promised you, I gave you my word, you should live in this house undisturbed."

"No. No. To wreck your future. Think," I said, playing on the fetish, "your wife and daughter. If the backing is refused you, it will get to them why it was refused. How can it be helped? I will sell the house. And," with a really decent impulse—for me—I added, "you must take the money."

He laughed.

"Of course not. But thank you, Amber. Three hundred thousand, even half a million, would mean nothing. We deal in larger figures. No, my dear, sell it, if you will, but the money is yours. You must be provided for."

A moment later he said:

"Amber. To drive you out. It doesn't seem fair."

"Don't worry about me," I replied, "and thank you, Mort, for all your goodness to me."

There was very little more of it. It was tacitly understood that a really clean sweep must be made. I would have to leave town, for a time, at any rate. And it would be blinding ourselves to facts even to pretend to plan a future life together. The thing must be done with. I must be cut

out of his life, as a cancer from a body it threatens to destroy. In no other way would those men be satisfied.

I sighed a little. It would have been wonderful, somehow, to have been able honestly to do the other thing. To watch a man toss away the fruit of twenty years and begin again—for me. But *I* could not begin again—for him. The thing was over.

The house was closed, was put in the hands of dealers. I dismissed the servants, went to see Jack Evans after all the months of partial estrangement from him, told him a little, but not all. He would not undertake the investment or care of my money again, and sent me to other lawyers. I talked with the people in my bank, converted some securities into more cash and sailed as soon as I could for London. The house was sold within three months to another Western over-night millionaire, and occupied by him and his family much as I had left it. I took only very personal belongings. Later, in London, I read that the Mexican deal had gone through and that Mort Dunne was in a fair way to become one of the wealthiest men in the United States.

Before we said goodbye he told me:

"If ever you are in difficulties, if you need money, you will come to me, Amber?"

I think he was distressed that the whole thing was so cold-blooded. It would have been more pleasing to his romantic heart had we at the end managed tears and plaints, had we been able to look back on our affair as a romance ending in tragedy and plead a fate too strong for us. But he was too clear-sighted to pretend and would have hated me for pretending. Fat bank directors as Fate—oh, no—not in that rôle, or at least not in the rôle of the Fate between lovers.

I told him I would call on him if I needed him. I meant to

keep my word. I had no hope—or no wish—that, once his financial security was as fixed as the stars, he would come back and beg me to take up our interrupted life. I knew he would not. It was probably a part of his concessions to the bankers that I should be cast off forever. He would keep his word. But I smiled a little, wondering who, when the smoke had cleared from the field and all things went well with the victor, the next woman would be. That there would be one I did not doubt.

And so I was once more free, and in four years after leaving Sumner more than four times as rich. I was worth more than half a million dollars, not including my jewels, valued at three times that amount.

Exit Mort Dunne. And that made three. Harcourt, Sumner, Mort. One husband, two lovers. I reviewed them with amazement. I had shared the years with these men, I had known them as intimately as a woman may know any man, and yet I did not know any of them. They had been strangers once. They were strangers again. Each had left his mark, in some subtle way. And yet, none had made The Mark that is lasting, indelible, bitten into the soul. The first I had fancied I loved; the second I had been bound to by unspeakable chains of sensation; the third I had liked and respected. What was there lacking in me that not one of them meant anything to me save a name? Even the memories of them seemed so unreal, they were dreams I had dreamed, nightmares from which I had awakened, or books I had once read and, remembering a little, had put back on the shelves. If I had a soul it had had no share in any of these matings. If I had a soul? Or had I none?

Chapter XIV

FROM London I drifted to Paris. Anna was with me, she was a faithful soul, an excellent maid, I could not learn to do without her. She was very discreet and never adopted toward me the familiar manner of a personal servant employed by a light woman. There had been other maids whom I had been forced to dismiss for that reason. Anna was different. A nice girl. Some day, when I re-enter the world of maids and not nurses, I will have Anna with me again. She will come. It has been hard for her—she was a material witness.

Sooner or later one meets everyone in Paris. I met Lottie Vayne, still with old Grossman. He had gone to Germany to talk pictures, and she had stayed in Paris, which she loved as only a girl of her type loves it. She spent most of her time in a fury of shopping and eating. I went around with her a little, and after she left was rather at loose ends.

Once at a party given by a man whom I had known I met an Englishwoman, an ex-Gaiety girl, Muriel Wilder, now the mistress of a rich Russian living in Paris. She was a tall, slender woman, very blonde, with magnificent yellow hair, sea-blue eyes, and teeth too beautiful to be real. They were not real, as I afterwards discovered. She was a rather entertaining, drawling person, whose antecedents were shrouded in the black mystery of London slums, but who had risen triumphantly over dropped haitches and a fondness for bloaters. She was quite happy with her Russian. He beat her, she told me, and she liked it. She was not

stupid, neither was she clever, she was merely a good companion, not too vulgar, and rather restful. I mention her because it was through her that I met Fuad.

She and I were together a good deal. The Russian approved of me, and was often away. He thought my hands as safe as any in which to leave her. We became known to all the night-life set, we were always at the gayest places, the gayest of all the people in them. I plunged into a species of dissipation as a reaction from my life with Mort. I even drank too much. I am not surprised that I did. I seemed to need the stimulant as I had never needed it before. I had often been tempted to drink when I was with Mort—but had not. I really had no talent for it, and Mort would have been angry. With Sumner I had not found such aids to excitement necessary.

Yet the drinking and even a casual trial of stranger forms of intoxication in Muriel's apartment did not affect my life. No men interested me, and I parried any attempts at intimacy. On one occasion, when a trip to Ostend was being planned, Muriel was quite vexed that I refused to make a fourth. She had found such a nice man for me, she said, an Englishman. I met him. A charming rascal, not much chin, but plenty of height, a little tubercular, a trifle perverted, the son of an earl who had been famed for his profanity and his wickedness in mid-Victorian days. I was not interested. The earl's son, moreover, consoled himself with a French girl whom Muriel knew, and the trip was taken without me.

Of course, everyone in Paris knew me. By everyone I mean the comparatively small circle with which I traveled. They also knew that I had money and need not go to Ostend—or anywhere else—for financial reasons. I became

rather the vogue. No man called me his own, yet I was a woman like the rest. It was intriguing.

When Muriel returned from her trip she heaped reproaches upon me.

"I know you didn't *have* to go, Amber," she said, "but it was so dull without you and we missed you. Beastly weather! I was rather bored. I'm glad to be back."

Later I did go on a trip with Muriel and her prince, just the three of us. We went to Monte Carlo. It was there that I saw Fuad for the first time.

In Monte Carlo I found I possessed the fever of the gambler. I had never played the wheel on that scale. I had played cards for money ever since I learned to play at all, with Harcourt. Sumner had had a small roulette wheel, and a good deal of money had changed hands at his private parties. Mort had not cared to gamble. At Palm Beach I had heard of the roulette, but Sumner had never cared to go there, he preferred California to Florida, and of course while Mort's wife lived there in the winter seasons, I could not go while I was with him. At Monte Carlo I became possessed of a new passion. I almost invariably won. It seemed strange. It was a little uncanny, the way I won. I could have afforded a reasonable loss; instead I left the tables each night with five and six, ten and twenty times the sum I had brought to the Casino with me.

Muriel said:

"You have the devil's luck."

I believed her.

I saw Fuad at a table, playing. Though I was intent on the wheel, I happened to look up once, past all the greedy faces, young and old, painted and powdered, male and female, and saw his eyes upon me. He was then in his thirtieth year, already gross. A tall, heavy man, with sensual

lips and heavy-lidded dark eyes. He was in correct Occidental evening clothes, but I guessed at once that he was an Oriental.

"Who is that?" I asked Muriel, who was standing in back of me, merely looking on.

She followed the direction of my eyes.

"Prince—Oh, I can't remember his name. It's at least a yard long. Hamdi Fuad, anyway. He's an Egyptian. Awfully swanky. Travels with a secretary and about eight ghostly looking servants, in costume. Shouldn't wonder if he has a maid, too—to perfume his bath—and all that sort of thing. He is always being run after by some woman or other. They say he has a harem in Cairo or wherever he comes from. He wears the most wonderful pearls in his native dress that I ever saw. I have seen him, at fancy dress balls."

"Do you know him?"

"No. Do you want to meet him?"

I said I did.

"I don't like niggers, myself," she said, with a shrug, "but it can be managed."

She spoke to her Russian, who knew Prince Fuad slightly. The thing was arranged. We had dinner together at Ciro's.

"It is Fate," said Fuad to me, as he bowed over my hand and I felt the hot touch of his heavy mouth on it. "I knew we should meet."

I was stimulated. Here was what I had been looking for —something new. The Oriental in him pleased me. Sumner had had a touch of that I had thought, but I now realized that Sumner's Orientalism was assumed, he was Oriental merely as he conceived the Orient to be. In Hamdi Fuad I met a perfectly natural simple creature—to all outward seeming. But back of the heavy-lidded eyes there ran

secret thoughts and darker thoughts than Sumner had ever harbored. At least so I fancied.

He had been educated at Oxford, spoke a beautiful English, a better French. He joined our party, easily, by some unobtrusive method, and made me instantly the center of attention, his and everyone else's.

"I am mad about blonde women," he said to me, frankly.

"Muriel is blonder than I," I said, not even pretending to misunderstand.

"Too cold. Red-blonde women have fire."

For a week we were much together. When Muriel, her Russian and I returned to Paris, Hamdi Fuad went with us, with all his elaborate suite. He established himself at my hotel and from then on was always with me. We became the talk of that portion of Paris interested in scandal.

He fascinated me, a little. I never knew what he was thinking. He never posed, he was often brutally direct, he was at times boyishly delightful. I learned from friends that he had large means, which however, were only an allowance from his family, a super-allowance, as it were. There were royal or semi-royal edicts to complicate things for him, but he could amuse himself as he wished.

Jewels he had, such jewels as even I had never seen. Pearls that made mine look small and valueless. I went to tea with him in his apartment, with Muriel and the Russian. He showed them to us.

"Some woman will take them from you, some day," volunteered Muriel.

A smile barely stirred the corners of his full red mouth.

"Women have worn them," he said gently, "but they were merely—loaned."

I found myself thinking—if ever I wear them. . . .

A week later he said to me:

"Will you have tea with me again, Madame? But alone?"

I consented. And one afternoon in fall had tea in the drawing-room of his immense suite.

After we had been served and the servants, soft-footed and in the dress that made me feel as if I were taking part in a play, were dismissed, Fuad leaned over the table.

"I have never seen a more beautiful woman . . . I will make you happy, Amber. Come to me, and let me show you how a man can love. You have never been loved. I see it in your golden eyes."

I looked at him, with the eyes he had just complimented.

"What do you know about me?"

He spread out his hands.

"That you have been married, that you are an American. That you are rich and can choose your lovers. That you have had a dozen."

"Comparatively true. But not a dozen. Two. That is all."

He did not believe me, I saw that. But he was not an Occidental. At the moment it paid him neither to contradict nor argue.

"Two or a dozen. What is the difference?"

"Ten," I said.

He laughed aloud like a pleased child.

"Very good. Ten. But you have not told me, Amber."

Suddenly I was terribly tempted. Impulses that had slept a long time, during all my colorless relations with Mort, stirred. I did not love Fuad, surely. But I thought he promised me, silently, new worlds of experience. I looked at his eyes and his pale dark skin and his mouth. I looked at his hands, with their long fingers and curious old ivory tinge. I could imagine them around my throat. Throat. I thought of his pearls.

Fuad's mistress? Why not? Yet why? I abruptly made up my mind to another course.

"I would not mind being your mistress." He raised his brows at that. I went on, speaking low. "But I have no need to be the mistress of any man. I am independent. If you want me—marry me. I have a fancy to be married. It is a long time since I was married. Fourteen years. Fourteen years ago I was divorced."

He was silent. His face was impassive. His brows drew together. Suddenly he laughed.

"Well, why not? I have never been married. It will be a new sensation. I have a flair for new sensations. I can marry whom I please. As long as I stay away from Egypt, no one cares what I do. As for the two—or twelve—well, nowadays almost any woman I might want to marry might number her adorers somewhere between the two figures and be less frank. I will marry you, Amber. But you shall be faithful to me, do you hear?"

For the fourth time in my life I promised to be faithful —what irony—and then I rose and gave myself to Fuad's kiss. A single kiss.

No more. I was too wise. But I was set on fire by the contact of virile vital lips again. I went to my rooms in a whirl. It was not for some time that I realized how greatly my social status would be changed. As Hamdi Fuad's wife few people could afford to ignore me. And that, as far as I was concerned, would be the newest sensation of all.

Chapter XV

WE WERE married in London by special license and spent the winter in a villa on Lake Como, loaned to Fuad by its owner, an Italian gentleman who was traveling. When the spring came we rented a small house in London on Green Street, and settled down.

It was curious to see how, little by little, people began to leave cards. After all, this was not America, but England. Fuad was rather a favorite in society, it was smart to know him, although nowadays Princes are thicker than leaves in summer in good society in every country, except, perhaps, in New York. Yet even New York is having its invasions of foreign semi-royalty. Besides, I was not an Englishwoman; consequently the stories attached to me as a tail to a comet did not seem to detract much from my popularity. The rather reckless well-bred set that Fuad had adopted was not particularly curious. What I had done on the other dim side of the Atlantic—it mattered very little. I had had the good taste to take unknown American lovers, and to amass some private means. I was educated, well-dressed, spoke my lines as a lady speaks. I had beauty, dignity, jewels, and a husband. I was, in short, the wife of Prince Hamdi Fuad.

So, for the first time I knew what it was to be, in a measure, *grande dame*. To move among people who, if their morals would bear watching, were impeccable in their manners, to dine and dance, lunch and tea with all that

was best, in the sense of known, in London society—a society in which, if there were scandals, they were scandals so ornamented with great names and great deeds of daring that they took on a certain lustre. I learned what the English house-party could be—the English weekend—we have nothing like it in this country—learned, also, when Fuad and I lived in a little rented place in Surrey, to give Lady This or That visiting without her husband the rooms adjoining those of Sir So-and-So, whose liaison with her had been so long-established an affair that it had assumed the character of a second marriage.

It was sinning so different from the sort I had been accustomed to, so frank and yet so cloaked with the courtly gesture of good breeding. Fuad and I did not entertain chorus girls and their keepers, as Sumner and I had done. In America it seemed as if things were either kept painstakingly under cover—*vide* myself and Mort—if the people were of any importance, or were simply vulgar alliances discussed on every corner of Broadway and Forty-second Street. In England, in the circle I knew, there was the same amount of sinning, but sinning in dress-clothes.

I had cabled Father of my marriage. Every week, in fact, since he and I had separated, on the day of my marriage to Harcourt Allan, I had written him. After I went to live with Sumner Dale I had had no word from him. Now he wrote me again. But he was far from satisfied by my new social position. He seemed to feel that Fuad, an alien soul, was more—or less—than a husband, as if any man who would consent to marry a woman like me must regard me merely as a legal mistress. Father did not feel that I had bettered myself! And to my urgent letters begging him to visit us, to make his home with us—an invita-

tion I extended without consulting Fuad—his reply was always "No."

Once he wrote me:

"Not long ago Bella confided to me that she had seen you. She had kept this to herself for over five years. I am glad you saw her if it gave you any happiness. She is well. Her husband, after a long struggle, has risen to the position of one of the cleverest young lawyers in Boston. He is doing well financially. They have moved out of town and have a small but lovely place at Pride's Crossing. The children are all splendid specimens. The youngest, born a little while after you saw Bella, is a very beautiful little girl."

I was glad for Bella when I read this. After the long up-hill pull, she could surely look forward now to peace and prosperity and sunshine in her middle years, her children growing up all around her, her husband respected and admired. I wondered a little as I read Father's letter, sitting in the Green Street house, in the dressing-room, while Anna brushed my hair—I wondered if after all it were not the better way. Bella's way, poverty and terror, sickness and struggle, fighting up with your man, every inch of the way, able to say truthfully that the victory was earned, when at last it came.

But I could never have done it; not I; not even Jane Saunders.

I became something of a professional beauty. My pictures were on sale in the shops, were published in English, American and French papers. All society opened its doors to me, except the very highest, which, after all, I dismissed from my mind as the dullest. I had no awkward moments. Once in a while I would meet, in some crush or other, pass in Hyde Park, or see strolling on Bond Street, someone I

had known. A man, perhaps, if the encounter took place at a social affair, a woman, likely, if it were on the street. But nothing ever happened. I was a little curious to know what Fuad would do if anything unpleasant ever occurred. Early in our marriage, even before it, I asked him:

"You run risks. I suppose you know that? A great many people know me in America, by name, by sight, by reputation. Others, fewer in number, have been at one time or another my friends. Suppose any were to meet me now?"

"As my wife," he answered, "you will have nothing to fear. I am quite capable of dealing with anyone who may annoy you."

It has been said that in the one essential relation between man and woman, the love relation, men, allowing for the differences of nature and personality, are much alike. I have said so myself, and still believe that a man passionately desiring a certain woman, is much the same as any other man in speech and even facial expression, in gesture and protestation before his object is attained, however different may be his method of approach. But once let the suitor become husband or lover—then you have variety.

In Harcourt I had encountered the normal man, almost a boy; in Sumner the older man, sated and perverse, Sadistic and impossible; in Mort the man of approaching middle age, whose passions were as quietly modulated as his speaking voice; in Fuad I found the most amazing mixture of all three—and with several elements quite his own. During our honeymoon months he was as natural, as charming, as ardent and young as Harcourt had even been. When the novelty wore off a little, he exhibited traits that out-Sumnered Sumner. And by the end of a year and a half he was,

except for occasional flare-ups or throw-backs into former moods, as uninspiring as Mort had ever been. In the fact that he was never faithful he resembled Sumner. But I was not jealous.

I found that I was expected to have as my guest any recent fancy of his when the idea seized him. I was not unwilling. He annoyed me in many ways, in his insistence that he was "absolutely English," his effort to be more English than Piccadilly, his constant attention to clothes, his love of strange perfumes, his delight in the bizarre. All of which contradicted his accent and his tailor's tag. He was inordinately vain, as a child is vain, would sulk for a day if I did not admire a necktie, the set of a coat, or compliment his horsemanship—which, by the way, was superb. He loved to play the country gentleman, the county squire, and when we were at Surrey he would run about in knickerbockers, which by no means became him. These were all moods. He had others in which he was too "Oriental" to be described.

Often it struck me as humorous that once, in high dudgeon, I had refused to bear Sumner Dale's name lest he use me as a cloak for his *amours*, while now, a few years later, I was performing the repudiated, kindly action for another man—I, a princess. Yet, after all, it was a little different. Fuad had been mad over me when he married me. When Sumner asked me to be his wife his passion was dead. Fuad's women friends were women, generally with husbands obligingly in the background, and well knew what they were about. Lilly Lawrence had been a young girl, innocent and unprotected. Curious, how often we condone our worst lowering of standards with the words "but this is different."

Fuad on the other hand watched me incessantly. He knew by tradition what to expect of me and was on his guard. But soon I convinced him that his spying was unnecessary. By the time we had been married three years, his "outside" affairs had become common talk and any number of men were willing to console me. But I was in no need of consolation. In my life with men there seems always to have come a period of indifference, after whatever fever had afflicted me had run its course, a period in which I marked time and waited. Such a crisis had come with Harcourt, also with Sumner, and again after I left Mort. I should have been warned, but was not.

Fuad's household, whether traveling, or in town, or in the country, was always large. He liked pomp and circumstance. He had a chef whose salary was absurd. Beside my maid Anna—not one whit disturbed by the change in the course of my stars—and his own English manservant who valeted him, he had six native servants, cat-footed, handsome men in native dress, with gentle voices and wild eyes, whose chief duties seemed to be to impress his guests. He also had at the time of our marriage, as I have said, a secretary, a middle-aged Frenchman, who many years before had been Fuad's tutor. If Fuad had been obeyed I too would have had a social secretary; but I thought that my invitations as well as his could be left in the adept hands of the quiet little Frenchman.

At the end of the third year of our marriage several things happened: Fuad turned from his high-born light o' loves and proceeded to flaunt openly about London with a dancer from one of the music halls, a Maida Lynn, head-lined everywhere, well known and very popular; the French secretary, who had often saved the situation for Fuad in more

ways than one, was stricken with tuberculosis and went to the south of France to live, or die, on a pension; Cecil Compson, born in a Sussex vicarage and just down from Oxford, succeeded Monsieur de Chartre; and I passed, with amazement, my thirty-seventh birthday.

Chapter XVI

A WOMAN'S life is so short. The best of it pressed into the shallow measure of twenty years. From twenty to forty. I think my type of woman begins to catch her breath at thirty-five. She matures, perhaps, earlier, or is forced into maturity. After forty, fifty comes so soon. We women whom men buy cannot look forward to fifty or even forty-five with any optimism. When youth is in the market what man is willing to pay a price for the only commodities we have to offer—worn flesh massaged and tended into a semblance of youth, eyes and cheeks and lips bright with cosmetics, minds a little dulled by years of unnatural alertness. There was Girlie, to be sure, who at fifty held her man, in one of those bonds, unbreakable enough, that are, by some chance, forged by time, as marriage bonds are forged. The happy wife, the happy mother, perhaps she does not dread fifty. I don't know.

Here I was at thirty-seven, startled into consciousness of the swift-slipping years. I was, as the books tell us, in my "prime," a rose beautifully blown, a rose that the passerby stops to admire, touches, observes the quick fall of the perfect leaves that a moment before showed no traces of disintegration, and, disappointed, turns from the spectacle of ruin to the tight little bud beside it. I had the famous figure of my maturity, not as slender as it had been at twenty-five, or even thirty, but without a remote approach to an ugly cloaking of fat. My red-gold hair, brightened by the careful use of henna, was still thick—it will not be gray, I

suppose, for many years yet. And my skin was still flawless. But it took attention. Vanished the days when hot water, soap and some good cold-cream were all it needed to keep its warm pallor flushing rose under the cheekbones. No, at thirty-seven—three years to forty—I had never been so beautiful, and never so conscious of the inevitable decline of beauty.

I became obsessed with the realization of the few remaining years ahead. The love years. The years of a man's desire. I haunted the beauty shops, I dressed with unusual care. I made brilliant effects, and became more widely known than ever. All around me women who still had youth were coming into prominence, women of twenty or thirty. Youth! I would have sold my soul for it, had I had a soul to sell.

Fuad was fettered by the black eyes and golden hair of his music-hall inamorata. He spent the entire day, the entire night with her. I saw him rarely.

I had always contributed my share toward our expenses. His allowance though large left little over after his personal needs were covered, and the salaries of his comic-opera suite, and the rental of the houses. My clothes, my maid, the upkeep of the houses, were all paid from my account. With the advent of his newest enthusiasm, a one-time waif of the London gutter, with grasping, ill-bred hands, I was forced again and again to help him out. In addition, I made good his losses at cards, which he played for exceptionally high stakes, hundreds of pounds in an evening, in an "exclusive" little club, where rich men foregathered. He lost steadily, more than once, before the quarterly allowance was paid into his bank.

I began to figure to myself that I owed Fuad very little. I had his name and the "loan" of his jewels. I had had

him as a lover for a short time after he became my legal husband. As a husband in any sense but the legal I had not had him. The three other men had supported me, had taken the financial responsibility of me on themselves. Not Fuad. I began to wonder what he would do if I amused myself as he did. Surely I owed him nothing but discretion?

When Cecil Compson first entered Fuad's service I was not impressed. He was a tall, slim young Englishman, with the look of extreme youth peculiar to his nation. A soft fair skin, light hair, eyes like blue lakes, features rather indeterminate, a charming voice, and nervous artistic hands. I had seen hundreds of English boys exactly like him—not the least difference between him and hundreds of others.

His first few months with us were uneventful; he did his work, was charming to me, rather shy and diffident, obviously admiring. I thought little of him, if at all. Fuad grumbled that he lacked the finesse of Monsieur de Chartre, and even went so far as to confide that de Chartre could have been counted upon to rescue him from any number of "scrapes," while he, Fuad, would never dare enlist Cecil's aid or advice in such circumstances.

"He is," said Fuad, "unnaturally innocent. One would think . . . at Oxford . . . ? But no, *noch nicht trocken hinter den Ohren.* He probably still believes in the stork."

"Come," I said, laughing, the words painting a curious little picture in my mind, a picture I did not at the time consider important, "he can't be as bad—or as good as that. My dear, this is the twentieth century."

Fuad glanced at me sharply:

"He knows nothing, that one," he said, positively. "He would not recognize irregularity in anything—or anyone—not even in you, my lady."

I started. It was by no means the first time that Fuad had dug at me so. I was angry.

"Just what do you mean by that?" I demanded.

Now he laughed.

"That went home, *hein?* But surely a harmless jest? Still, if the cap fits. What a light now in the golden eyes! I have not been able to set them glowing for so long. And the face of an injured angel! Really, Amber, your expression of outraged innocence would do credit to my unfledged secretary!"

"You have not answered my question," I remarked, fighting down an impulse to throw my coffee cup straight into that sneering, grossly handsome face.

"Have I not? You want it in plain English. You Americans are so accurate. You call a spade a spade—or a pretty lady a *fille-de-joie*. After all, my friend, the years must have left their mark. I was only wondering, idly, that the signs should be hidden from Mr. Compson's masculine eyes. I have noticed the almost exaggerated respect with which he treats you. But perhaps it is only the English love of a title, even an acquired one. He *does* always treat you with respect, does he not?" he went on insinuatingly. Then with a change:

"But don't worry, my dear, no one is apt to enlighten him. He has the Galahad air which is like armor against gossip. You're safe enough."

I put down my coffee cup. No servants were in the room. I had to put it down. Then I rose and left; his laughter followed me. Fuad was a little drunk. And he was always insulting when drunk, sometimes also when sober.

I repeat the conversation because it was typical.

When a man dropped out Cecil was sometimes pressed

into service to make up a party. All of our parties were questionable. Clever over-wise men, light women with good old names much tarnished. I recall one affair in Paris, after Cecil had been in our employ about four months. There were eight or ten of us at a restaurant that was one of the secret sights of the city, and was noted for its orchestra and its preponderance of fragile looking, long-haired men and sturdy short-haired women. Our party, exclusive of Cecil, amused themselves with comments, gossip, prophecies. Several of the women I had known well when I lived in Paris before my marriage to Fuad. Some of them had had the run of Muriel Wilder's apartment, without the sanction, however, of her Russian. What little dabbling in drugs and other draughts of Nepenthe I had indulged in had been in their erratic company. They were restless women, given to the bitterest jealousies among themselves, to notorious infidelities; they were more promiscuous than any man and were forever breaking their perverse hearts on the sharp-edged rocks of sterile passions.

"But to thee, Atthis, the thought of me is hateful; thou flittest to Andromeda."

Throughout the evening one or two of them were always at our table. A Corsican girl I had once known intimately whispered to me for half an hour. I saw Cecil eye her with instinctive distaste as she left me, shrugging her shapely shoulders. Another, a hard-bitten English woman with the face of a young Caesar on a coin, cropped, curly white hair, a slim, broad-shouldered figure, dressed in a loose silk blouse and riding breeches, and carrying a crop, for no reason that was apparent, said to me, with a hard, deep laugh and indicating Cecil with a jerk of her thumb:

"Where did you find Cupid? He never takes his eyes off you. That pretty boy—he looks younger than anything

I have ever seen—in this damned place. Are you going in for that sort of thing, my girl? It's the last resort."

I turned my back on her. Later I remembered the malicious speech. That stay in Paris was short.

Every now and then we would "run over" to Paris, whenever Fuad was possessed of a desire to "get away," which generally occurred after he had had a particularly bad run of luck at cards, or when he had disagreed with his London Gertie. I was always glad to go. I was so bored by everything. Anna was ready to pack at ten minutes' notice.

We were in the country once more, in summer. Sussex. Cecil had been with us for six months or so and was doing his work, such as it was, quietly and well. We had rented a small house by the sea, and Fuad, restless, had gone up to London for several days. I was alone in the house with Cecil and the servants and a married couple who were guests at the time. The woman—her name doesn't matter, I have forgotten all but her first name—and I had been riding. As we passed the flung white beach at the foot of the drive I saw Cecil standing there.

"What a figure!" said my companion.

He had been bathing. Stood up on the sheltered beach now, tall and slim in scant bathing trunks, his torso rising as white as a woman's above it. He stretched his arms above his head, I saw the long fine muscles ripple. He was a deceptive person in clothes; his slenderness hid strength and a wiry endurance. For a moment he stood there, dazzling white in the sunshine.

I put the whip to my horse and dashed up the drive to the house. I was consumed with a fever of wayward thoughts.

That night I watched him at dinner. I had had him seated beside me, and I tried to make him talk. He was

deferential, subdued, shy. His face glowed with color under the fresh tan, his eyes were so clear and deep one might have drowned in them.

After bridge, I went to bed early and tossed the night through. I kept seeing that boy, with the ocean for his background. He might have been the young Adam before the advent of Eve. Fresh, untainted, with no passions to look back on except those for "footer" or cricket.

What was it he had that I wanted? Youth! Youth! I turned on the bed-light and tried to read. I kept seeing that picture between the lines of print. He was so young —and so unweary—and I was thirty-seven.

In the morning I tried to face it. But it eluded me. I kept making excuses, denials.

Fuad remained in town. The couple left. Cecil and I were alone.

I always breakfasted in bed. On this gold and rose day in August I startled Anna—I had never seen her startled before—by saying I would breakfast in the dining-room. I was petulant, tossed three or four negligées aside; the black-and-gold was too sophisticated, the mauve-and-corn made me look washed out. Anna, the stolid, was nearly in tears before I finished with her. I had her arrange my hair at least six different ways. At the end I myself took it, brushed it off my forehead, pulled it over my ears, and plaited it in one great braid that hung to my hips. And finally I chose the new negligée that I had not yet worn, as golden an amber as my eyes with an underslip of cool jade-green.

When I heard Cecil leave his room and go to the breakfast room, I followed. What Anna thought I did not know, I did not care.

He was at the hot-water dishes on the sideboard when I entered. He turned and, I swear, blushed when he saw me.

"Oh!" I said, "I thought you had gone long ago. Do I disturb you?"

"Disturb?"

I sat down.

"Some men hate women around at breakfast," I said, "and some like them in order to have an audience for breakfast bad humor."

He laughed a little.

"But—but how nice to see you. I am late, I'm afraid. I don't pretend to an exceptionally amiable disposition, but I'm always rather keen at breakfast. It's wonderful down here, ripping air, ripping water. I've had a swim already."

I closed my eyes—just for a moment.

"But I say, how rude I am! May I help you? I was just considering the deviled kidneys."

For years tea and toast had been my whole breakfast. The thought of kidneys horrified me. Nevertheless I let him help me to some, and to broiled ham. And I poured his coffee, and regretted I had not had an early tea in my room, as he undoubtedly had had.

"I say, how jolly to have company," he said, with his extraordinary boyishness. "Ever since I have been with the Prince I have taken breakfast alone."

Fuad's habits were much like mine.

I drank my coffee and looked across the table. The sunlight coming through the leaded panes made a golden helmet of his hair.

"Have you much work to do today?"

"Very little. I don't think I really earn my screw," he said engagingly. "Just a few letters to write, some invita-

tions to answer. I am sometimes ashamed of the little I am called on to do."

"Very well. I will engage your spare time. I have a fancy to picnic, on the downs. Will you come as basket bearer and courier in general?"

"Will I? May I, I mean? It's been years since I picnicked."

After a moment, he said very shyly:

"Do you mind—I must say it, you know—you look——"

"How?"

"I think it's a daffodil," he said earnestly, "but I can't be sure."

He arranged for luncheon with the chef and we motored to the picnic place, one that I had seen some days ago and thought perfect for just such an adventure. We took my own car, the little open Rolls Royce, and I drove.

I suppose it was a lovely day, and the Sussex downs are famed the world over for their beauty. But I remember little of that. All I remember, after the luncheon which included a bottle of white wine culled from Fuad's most sacred bin, was sitting there looking down at Cecil, who lay full length beside me, a pipe between his teeth, his blue eyes on the same blue above. The sun and the wind and perhaps the wine had coaxed him out of his shyness, and he kept up a rapid fire of talk while I listened and only injected a word now and then to draw him out—and wondered—wondered.

He talked mostly of the vicarage, not many miles from where we sat, in which he had been born. Of the three sisters, all married now, of the mother who had died in his last year in Oxford, of the breaking-up of the family. He would like, he said, to show me the house—and the rose garden his mother had made and loved terribly. But there

were other people in the house now; his father was in Canada with the oldest sister. There were no other brothers. The family had spoiled Cecil a little, he owned wistfully.

I had a picture of that happy, quiet English family, picnicking like this, but not like this, playing lawn-tennis, visiting the poor, working in the rose-garden, swimming in the sea. It was out of a novel.

I suggested girls. Neighbors.

He hadn't cared much for girls, he said. Not ever. Been afraid of them, he fancied. Some, the younger ones, his sister's friends, giggled and said "Really?" much too often. The older ones frightened him off. He'd been in digs with a chap at Oxford, a tremendous fellow, absolutely. Girls, no end—a tobacconist's assistant, a bar-maid, a girl from London, an actress. How Jack, that was his name, Jack Staunton, pulled it off, Cecil didn't know. Every morning the post full of pink notes. Jack had laughed at him.

I thought of what Fuad had said. Searched the blue eyes for a hidden glint of laughter. It was not there. Laughter, yes, but all at himself.

"I've talked for hours. What must you think of me! But you've listened and been so kind—and made me talk. Mother used to say she was the only one who could make me talk. Generally I am as silent as the what-do-you-call-it in the desert. But it's your fault that I've babbled like this."

I descended to pathos.

"I never had a mother——"

"Oh, I say!"

He was all genuine pity. I gave him an edited account of my girlhood. In which poor Mother figured as the cruel stepmother of the fairy tale.

"Poor lonely little thing," he said. "But how any one could help loving you . . . "

That was enough for one day.

We had three days before Fuad came back, three days in which I managed to convey to Cecil how unhappy I was, what a mistake I had made in marrying this dazzling employer of his. It was all very delicately done. Still it seemed to me that only a child would be deceived. Perhaps I was right.

By the end of the third day he was my sworn knight. I had hinted of unspeakable cruelties.

When Fuad returned he obligingly bore me out, that is, by treating me with his usual indifference. Then he issued invitations for a house-party in which Maida from London was included. I made no demur. I would not have in any case, not for some years past; in this instance it fitted in well with my plans.

I said nothing to Cecil. I merely drooped a bit in his presence and was silent. The second night of the house-party, while the majority of the people were playing bridge, I remembered I had left my wrap in the garden. Maida and Fuad were in the garden. I sent Cecil for the wrap.

He came back without it, his face white.

"Where's my cape?"

He looked down at his arm in ludicrous surprise.

"Didn't I bring it? What an ass I am! I'll go back."

"No. Never mind."

I drew him into the niche made by a bow-window.

"What has upset you?"

"Nothing."

"Tell me."

He put out his hand, drew it back.

"Listen—Princess—I must leave. Tomorrow. Or as soon as I can get someone in my place."

I smiled to myself. But raised grave eyes to his.

"You aren't happy with us?"

"Happy . . . " He laughed, shortly. "Happy enough. But I can't stay. I—I couldn't keep my hands off him if I did. Forgive me," he said low.

A great light apparently dawned on me.

"You've seen them then? My husband and——? But of course you have. My dear boy, don't be distressed. I have known it a long time. But I must pretend not to know. For my own safety—Cecil—don't leave us."

"I must go," he muttered.

The end of the room was in darkness, only the moonlight came in through the great windows. In the smaller room adjoining the bridge players were laughing; in the hall someone was at the piano.

I put my hand on his. He started as if it burned him.

"I am so lonely," I said. "Stay. Be my friend. Help me. You would only hurt me by—any rash action. I need a friend."

My voice broke a little. Oh, it was not all acting. I was so sorry for myself. I was getting old—old. This blind boy beside me had youth, had pity, had chivalry, had all the decent things I liked. I hated him and desired him.

After a minute he said:

"If you need me, I'll stay."

In bed that night I determined to tell him to go. If he stayed I would not answer for my whims. The youth, the innocence, the untouched Sir Galahad in him! How disgusted, how shocked to his soul's core he had been at poor Fuad and the London Gertie. If he knew about me? But he would not know.

He must go! My God, I was like Sumner—Sumner and Lilly Lawrence. I understood now—that craving to warm one's cold hands at the flame of youth, to wash the feet of sin in the clear wine of purity. Like Sumner, jaded, old, wanting the newest sensation. He must go. And with him the hope of attaining a last final miracle of renaissance, such as Noel Hunter had promised me and I had refused. Well, I would not be such a fool again. I was older now. In this boy's eyes I saw myself reflected and yet changed, young, glamorous, enchanted.

How could I keep him with me?

Chapter XVII

WHEN morning came I was haggard from a sleepless night. I looked every day of seven and thirty. I stayed in my room until teatime and tried to puzzle things out. I felt as if I had been caught in a swift current and were being swept out to sea. I wondered if I could stop myself, and like the weakened swimmer clutching at the proverbial straw, I clutched at the insincere wish that Cecil would by now have thought better of his resolve to stay. At teatime I learned that Fuad and his guests had taken the cars and were gone for the afternoon. Mr. Compson, said the butler, had not gone with them. I hesitated a moment, then sent him a message asking him to come to the living-room for tea with me.

He came, very white, his mouth a little unsteady.

After tea, during which we talked as strangers talk, I said to him:

"Cecil—if you think you had better go—please don't let anything I have said, in a moment of emotion, change your determination."

I held my breath. He answered, shortly:

"No, I will stay."

Suddenly we smiled at each other, half, I think, afraid to smile.

Then began a period of almost adolescent emotions. I was curiously happy for a time, surrounded by the atmosphere of devotion that shone from Cecil's eyes or was conveyed in the fleeting touch of his hand. He seemed to be

always there, guarding me. I deluded myself with the thought that the situation could go on as it was indefinitely; also deluded myself with the added thought that I did not wish it to change. But something sat in my brain and laughed at delusions and bided its devil's time.

Fuad was moody. Maida of the music-halls was a drain on his vitality and pocketbook. He would disappear for a day or two and then return, sometimes alone, sometimes with a crowd of people, and would be as ugly to me as only Fuad could be. He had a way of saying dreadful swift things, cutting and sharp. We scarcely spoke an amiable word. He had not come through the door that separated our rooms for many weeks. He treated me as if I were a sort of super-servant, cavilled at my clothes, the way I dressed my hair, would have fits of economy and wilder fits of extravagance.

One day he asked me for the rope of pearls he had bestowed upon me when we were married; he wished, he said, to have them restrung. I gave them to him knowing I would never see them again. Cecil was in the room at the time and I looked at him quickly to see if he realized the significance of the apparently casual request. He did, I saw it in the quick tightening of his brows, and in the look cast at the unconscious Fuad's broad back.

Not long after London rang with the tale of Maida's pearls. Cecil heard it, came to me.

"The man is impossible," he said finally. "He is the talk of London. Surely, surely you cannot stand it any longer."

I was in the garden, it was late afternoon. He walked beside me for a moment, then caught desperately at my hand.

"You're—so sweet——" he said painfully, "I can't bear to have you hurt——"

"I am not hurt," I told him. "It is the price I pay for a marriage of ambition."

At that the gods must have rocked with laughter on their high thrones.

When we returned to London, Cecil lived in rooms nearby. He came every morning after breakfast and stayed until after tea, attending to Fuad's correspondence, making and breaking appointments for him, straightening out his accounts, generally at his beck and call. I saw him, naturally, a great deal. And all the time the secret message flashed between us.

I knew how he regarded me—as a persecuted woman, high as the stars above him, an ideal, a woman of scarcely flesh and blood. If his pulses stirred at my proximity—and I know they did, by his quickened breath, his sudden color, his veiled eyes—no doubt he felt himself a beast, and had he lived in another age he would have castigated himself for his body's betrayal, half unconscious, I verily believe, of what the new signals portended. I watched him, much as a cat the cornered mouse. He grew pale, thin, nervous.

Once Fuad said, looking away from me, then turning so suddenly that he had me in full view:

"My young secretary languishes. In another I would diagnose unrequited love, or love too well requited. The symptoms are often the same."

My face was never off guard, not in those days. If Fuad expected to see something that would answer the question in his mind, he was disappointed. I said lightly:

"He must be working too hard. Your correspondence

is so voluminous. Or are the mauve notes not answered by the confidential amanuensis?"

Poor Fuad! There were many women in London who yearned to add "an Egyptian—too sweet, my dear—so Oriental!" to their train. What is there about being born in the East that causes a man to be besieged by women? What fascination, what promise of the new and strange? I read this speculation in women's eyes when I and Fuad met them. And I did not censure them too severely. I had known that urge for adventure, that explorer's curiosity myself. And longed to tell them that Fuad was a man like any they had known. And yet, in the things they would not consider essential, how unlike!

He was something, I now think, of a real philosopher. Nothing of an analyst. He lived, surely, for the day, the good or evil thereof being sufficient. He, for all his passion for "blonde" women or for Occidental women generally, granted no one of them a soul, only a body, temporarily desirable. He scorned us all, I believe, even Maida. But did not stop to analyze his scorn. In his attitude toward me he, of course, conformed to the pattern that any man who had the misfortune to marry me would have followed. There are no two ways about it. But he conformed more philosophically, almost with a shrug. It was curious, not his conventional attitude, but the juxtaposition of it to his alarming jealousy, which endured, nay, increased after his passion for me had flared up and been blown out by the winds of the little years. In proportion, it seemed, to his fading interest the jealousy waxed. A dog in the manger. I cannot think that it was his honor about which he was so concerned. His honor was an empty thing; he himself had so defamed his ancient name that nothing I could do would harm it more. I fancy he regarded me as

a dearly bought possession and could not contemplate the loss of it. Had I been his mistress he would have let me go at the appointed time. But I was his wife, and doubly branded with the stamp of ownership. Therefore, when his use for me was over he needs must dust me and put me on a shelf, and woe betide the illegal hands that reached up to rescue me from that high position.

But it is idle to speculate on Fuad. I never knew him, what he thought, what he *was*. I have merely deduced, and my deductions may be right or wrong. I do not know. He was baffling because he was so simple, apparently so easily read. He seemed a child, a primer beside Sumner Dale. Even Mort Dunne had moments of opaqueness that were superior to Fuad's. For that reason I now think he was a primer written in Egyptian, and therefore to me unreadable.

Rest his soul. If there is any rest for souls such as his.

Cecil. Little by little his subjugation became my one aim in life, in living. Infidelity to the present man was a new sensation to me. I had had a certain code in my sinning; there is caste in everything; nothing so low but looks down on something else. Now, I argued that owing Fuad nothing, I owed myself a last—yes, I said, a last—forgetfulness, a *rausch*, an intoxication. Headache in my old age might be the result, but I would pay the price for the final purchase.

The necessity for extreme caution was a spur. I now enjoyed intrigue. I had never known intrigue since the innocent days of my love-making with Harcourt. The rest had been cut and dried, oblique courtship and surrender. But the secret glance, the stolen kiss, the furtive embrace, these I had not known. I would know them now, and I

would be clever enough to know them to the full and with no chance of detection.

The first step after so much marking of time, so many preliminary half-steps and withdrawals, was very easy. Many good women have employed the same methods to ensnare some benighted male—object matrimony.

Fuad was driving in Hyde Park with his Maida. I had openly planned to have three women in for bridge, and then cancelled the invitations on the grounds of a *migraine*. Cecil was working in his small office off the room Fuad had appropriated for his own. Dusk crept over London, the cold sudden dusk of winter, short and depressing. I came from my room in a loose white house-gown with a girdle of silver, my arms full of early lilacs, and went softly down the stairs. The lamps had not been lighted; in Cecil's study alone there burned one shaded light.

He did not hear me until I was at the door. The lilacs fell to my feet. He sprang up from his chair and came forward to gather them up.

"How you startled me," I said. "I thought you were gone—I am sure I heard the door close. I was coming down to put these on your desk."

As I spoke I stooped, our hands met, we straightened up, suddenly, handfast, in the partially pierced gloom of the open door.

He was very near me, confused, the clear red in his cheeks. I swayed a little toward him.

"The house was so dark," I said petulantly, "and there seems to be no one in—except you—and me . . . "

"Except you and me!" he repeated mechanically.

His arms went about me. I raised my face. His boyish kiss fell awkwardly, not on my mouth, but somewhere on my cheek. He half withdrew his arms, I heard him call

on his Deity under his breath, clung closer, turned so that his hot face was pressed to mine, so that he found my lips.

It was an inexpert kiss, but not cold—not cold.

"Forgive me, forgive me," he stammered, "I was out of my mind."

I was out of his arms, running softly up the stairs, as fleet and silent as a ghost.

For a few days I kept out of his way, was never alone with him, not for an instant. I knew the value of such tactics. He would have to see me at meals, meet me in the hall, hear my cool "Good morning," my cooler "Good-bye"; he would have the long nights in which to think of me and remember, and, if he could, regret. The first taste of forbidden wine creates a need, a parching of the throat that is almost unbearable. It is a mistake to leave the bottle at the eager hand, the glass at the lips—lest the long draught slake the thirst and quiet the fever. I knew he would finally be driven to seek me. I would make no further move until he did. I bided my time.

The analogy of cat and mouse was no longer apt; that of spider and fly was closer.

"Will you walk into my parlor?"

Eventually he did. I had a room off my bedroom, half study, half boudoir. I did not sulk within its four walls, or not often, nor did I study much. I read in it a great deal, lay on a chaise longue with lotions over my eyes and sweet-smelling hideous-looking masks on my face, served tea to women friends, sometimes even to a small mixed company; wrote my letters to Father, my occasional note to Jack Evans and to Lottie Vayne. (Grossman had died and left her enormously well off, and she was entertaining New York by wearing weeds and talking of a convent.)

Cecil knocked. I answered.

Anna was in the bedroom running ribbons in some lingerie. A discreet girl, Anna. I have often wondered what lay in the back of her mind.

I exchanged the most conventional greetings with Cecil and I heard her slip quietly out of the room. I knew, with no proof or precedent, that she had stationed herself where she could watch, where if Fuad came along, she would be the first to see him and convey some exceptionally delicate warning to me.

Cecil had some letters in his hand. He innocently disposed of Fuad in almost his first words.

I had turned from the desk where I was sitting and made a play with my pen, a show of impatience and preoccupation.

"Well?"

"I am sorry to disturb you. The Prince sent me upstairs. He wishes to know if these are correct."

He crossed the room, handed me the papers, and stood at a ludicrous distance.

I took the notes, answers to invitations issued to Fuad and me jointly, and glanced over them.

"Quite all right," I said carelessly. "You are sure this one does not conflict with Lady Meredith's dance, or are we 'doing' both?"

"Both, I believe."

"That is all then."

I turned back to my desk. He went to the door. My back was to him, but I listened to his footsteps, swift, then dragging, hesitating. I heard him stop by the door, which was open, heard him close it partly, affected to write, heard him come back, less uncertain now, and stand beside me.

"Oh—I thought you had gone," I said, "the door . . ."

and stopped, conscious of having uttered much of the same words before.

"Yes. No. . . ."

I looked at him.

"What *is* the matter, Cecil?"

He broke out then. The words came low and helter-skelter.

"I've been in such misery . . . hell. . . . Night and day. . . . Cannot you forgive me? Say you forgive me. . . . Down there in Sussex . . . so sweet, so kind . . . we were friends. Since we have come up to London you have changed so—and now, since my madness—so indifferent and—"

I cut in:

"Please don't distress yourself. There is nothing to forgive. I had forgotten it. A momentary madness. There, run back to your letters and leave me to mine. Of course we are friends, here is my hand on it."

I held out a cool hand, steady and friendly. He took it, pressed it hard, released it, and stood back, with bitter disappointment on his face.

"Madness, yes. Not momentary," he said.

I heard Anna stir outside my door. I said, hurriedly:

"Go now. If you will, we shall talk later."

I accompanied him to the door. There, suddenly changing my attitude to one of helpless weakness and pleading, I whispered:

"Don't make it harder for me, Cecil. I am trying to act for the good of both of us . . . Help me . . . There are two of us here who are not sane."

I saw the light flash into his eyes, the light of chivalry, of answer, of something else—of triumph, realized, unhoped for, yet dreamed of.

The door closed behind him. I heard him whistle his way down the stairs. I went back to my desk and stared at the unwritten sheet of note-paper. It had been an effort to keep my hands from his shoulders, hard not to woo once more the touch of the boy's lips to mine. But this was better, this waiting game. It would take careful acting to undermine the chivalry and let the triumph sweep all before it. I must walk warily.

Chapter XVIII

ON THE third day following this episode Cecil said to me as we passed each other in the hall:

"Look here, I must talk to you. Could you—meet me somewhere?"

I reflected—apparently.

"I'll let you know."

I kept him waiting a day. Then, going into his office on a pretext, I said, formally:

"I am going out to bridge and tea this afternoon. I expect to be home late, Mr. Compson, should anyone call—not until seven." In an undertone, I added swiftly: "I shall be at your rooms at five-thirty. Can you be there?"

A naïve expression of startled wonder swept over his face. He said aloud, stammering a little:

"Very well, Princess." And lower, the one word. "Yes."

I walked through the office into Fuad's study, where he was sitting sunk in an armchair, an unopened book on his knee, the floor in front of him strewn with papers.

"I shall be out this afternoon," I said. "The Maynards are dining here. At eight-thirty. You have not forgotten?"

He raised dull eyes to mine.

"No."

I turned to go.

"Amber."

He rose, shut the door into Cecil's study and said:

"I'm a bit bothered—this debt to Sir Henry. It must be paid. I'm ahead of my allowance. Could you tide me over?"

"How much?"

"Two thousand."

"For the last time?" I inquired.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"How do I know? You are infernally unwilling to part with your—ill-gotten gains, Amber."

I controlled myself with an effort.

"The American market is slumping," I said. "I hear from the States that many of my holdings are down. And living is expensive, Fuad. Please remember this is not the first time you have come to me."

I lied. The markets were not down; on the contrary, they were up. I was making money. But I was tired, tired of this constant drain on my purse. I had to look ahead. A penniless old age was not in the picture as I saw it.

He was silent and sullen. I regarded him a moment, then broke out:

"This once then. But not again. I am a little bored with your frequent requests for help—"

"You're my wife," he cut in, "share and share alike. To be sure we made no bargain, but in exchange for a name and a position, I should think—"

"Share and share alike!" I repeated, interrupting. "Since when have I shared in your income, Fuad? I leave that to Maida—and the others. However, as you seem to feel that I have bought the respectability, such as it is, of your name, I will try to save it from the dishonor of unpaid card debts. I will give you the check this evening."

I went to my room, a little sick. *Money meant a great deal to me.* I saw no chance of getting my hands on any new capital. I was dependent on the money invested, for the most part, in America. To be sure, this sum had ma-

terially increased since my marriage, but so had the demands on it.

So I arrived at Cecil's room in a state bordering on the wildest rebellion. If I must pay for Fuad's fun in cold cash he would pay for mine in honor.

An incurious landlady let me in. Cecil, apparently, had told her I was coming, or had made some explanation. She showed me up to the third floor. He was at the door, waiting.

His rooms were small, furnished well but in no particular taste, ordinary enough. There was a coal fire in the grate, tea things on a small table. He helped me with my furs, wet with the fine drift of snow that was falling. I had dismissed the car at the Green Street house, let myself in with my key, and gone out again on foot. No one had seen me, not the chauffeur, not any of the servants.

It was not likely that Fuad would ask the man at what time I had returned from Lady Oxbridge's.

"Well?" I said as he took my furs and I sat down in a shabby chair by the fire. "Here I am. What was it you wished to say to me?"

He drew a hassock to my feet, sat there, facing me, his head flung back.

"Now that you *are* here—nothing," he said, with simplicity. "Only I love you so much I can't stand seeing you every day. I have had to reconsider my agreement. I must leave the service of the Prince. Go out to Canada to my sister—or to hell—it doesn't much matter."

"Why can't you stand seeing me?" I asked, gravely enough.

"The—the nearness," he stammered. "I keep remembering—at night. Oh, my God!"

I touched his shoulder.

"Cecil—don't be unhappy. There is no need. If I told you there was no need, would that make it bearable? Could you stand seeing me every day and knowing in your heart that I was—yours?"

He took my hands, held them to his face. He was incredibly innocent—or a fool. Even now he did not understand.

"Mine," he said, "in my heart? Yes, I have called you that. But. . . ."

"In my heart, too," I said.

The hot color came under the clear skin. I felt the touch of his young inexperienced mouth as he crushed my hands to his lips.

"You, too? But you have never said it. Thank you—for that—I don't see why—but you do, don't you?"

"I do," I said.

He rose to his feet, leaned against the mantel, and looked down at me.

"I can't believe it. You sit there in that chair, like a figure carved out of gold and ivory, and smile and say you love me. But—the word blesses me, and will bless me all my life. But I shall have to go through the days and months less near to you than now, calling you mine, knowing you his."

It was getting a little tedious. I rose, came close to him.

"Cecil . . . I am not his, not in the sense you mean. Not now. Not for a long time. And I am yours . . . whenever you want me. . . ."

I saw the red come again, the pallor that followed it.

"You don't mean—you *can't* mean?—I couldn't let you," he said, scarcely audible, "such a sacrifice! Think of the risk. For your own sake I cannot let you. Dear, generous heart."

I swear it, the tears stood in the boy's eyes. I was outwardly all tenderness and half timidity, inwardly I was two women, one raging at the obstinacy of him, the other sensuously playing with the moment.

"Cecil—you don't know what my married life has been—with that man. Before I married him, I didn't know—didn't dream—he fascinated me—and the title—and so I married him. I paid for it. Cecil, surely, surely, life owes me a little happiness. I am not afraid to take it—with you."

This speech almost burned my mouth. If ever a woman gave an impression of innocence betrayed by marriage, longing for expression in release, it was I. Every slow difficult word, every gesture was perfectly done. Nothing was real but the desire which so masked itself in appeal. I wondered, briefly, that any man could be taken in, that my too-eager lips and eyes did not betray me.

It was well played. I was thrown on his chivalry. Once his chivalry had bidden him to leave me, now it urged him to stay.

I hurried on, watching his changing face.

"I couldn't think it wrong. It *isn't* wrong—just loving and giving, Cecil. Surely I can have a little moment of love before I die?"

That was another speech so ironic that I almost laughed aloud. A little moment of love—when life had been composed chiefly of such moments for over twenty years!

"If you don't love me enough. . . ."

His arms went around me, the youth in him flamed up at the contact, and suddenly he was kissing my face, my hair, from which the little fur toque had fallen, my bare throat.

I was late dressing for dinner, and dressed mechanically, was short with Anna, by turns petulant and gay. I was

tired, mentally and physically, and yet stimulated. I felt young as if in some way I had taken of Cecil's youth and made it mine. I felt much as a man must feel who, jaded and weary, holds in his arms the embodiment of youth and finds that it is misleadingly contagious.

As Anna arranged my hair and I stared into the mirror at my shining eyes and flushed cheeks I saw ahead of me hours of rapture in which I might drink deep of this new forgetfulness, in which I for the first time would be teacher and not pupil or equal, and would lead the beloved tyro to wider fields of happiness than he had known existed.

We had arranged that it would be safer if I came to his rooms. I was to manage to let him know when I could come. The landlady was not of a prying disposition, did not know who I was, yet I felt that the proximity of the lodging-house to Green Street was dangerous. I told Cecil something else must be done and I would find a way.

A week later I rented a little furnished apartment in another section of London for which Cecil and I were each provided with keys. It was in a house where rents were high in return for "no questions asked," and in a neighborhood that hid a furtive business of rendezvous and assignations under a strictly respectable appearance. Cecil was to remain in his old rooms, but I would not risk going to them again. It seemed the safer way, and after a moment he agreed.

Our discussion took place in Green Street in his office, when Fuad was not at home. The door stood open for caution's sake. I said:

"I will see the woman today and take the rooms. When I looked at them yesterday they seemed just what we would want."

"I hate the necessity for it all," he muttered. "If only you would leave all this, Amber, and come away with me."

"And ruin you? Never!"

"You never think of yourself," he said tenderly, gratefully, "only of me. But think of yourself before—this. If you still tell me to go away, I will. But it will be three times as hard now. Nevertheless, if you say so I'll go. You don't know what I have suffered these days—remorse, regret—for your sake. To drag you down. It seems horrible. Yet I can't think our love is wrong."

"Don't be a foolish boy," I said. "We shall be quite safe. I am not regretful. I owe him—nothing."

"And I everything to you."

So we took the rooms. And for a time played with love as only the very young can play. Cecil was grateful, as much my slave as a dog is slave to the beloved master. He was my property, a thing no man before him had ever been. I could be imperious and soft with him by turns. He was bound over to me, and I loved the sensation of holding the whip-hand and, yes, the purse strings. He had wanted to manage the rent from his tiny income; we had had quite a quarrel, in fact, when he learned that I was determined to pay it myself. It was only after I assured him that I had my own income apart from Fuad's, "a legacy," I vaguely termed it, that he consented.

And so, little by little, I fell into the ancient ways of women who follow the red star of Venus. At thirty-seven I took a young lover and, in a measure, became physically, morally and financially responsible for him.

Except for the rent of the furnished rooms in which we met, the money question did not at first enter into our relationship. Soon, however, the liaison became an established thing, and Cecil, from the grateful mortal to whom

a goddess has stooped, became by imperceptible but natural degrees the conquering male to whom a weak woman had surrendered.

Fuad planned a trip on the Continent. I refused, for the first time, to accompany him. I had made other plans, I told him, for London and not for abroad. A little to my amazement he seemed relieved. The explanation came when I learned that the still alluring Maida was taking a holiday from her strenuous life of high kicks and Catharine wheels. I even loaned Fuad a considerable sum of money when he complained that he was "too short to do the trip decently."

I saw him off at the station with something of the sensation of a truant.

Before he left the question of my going out alone arose. There were several house-party engagements for which we were both booked.

"You can go alone," he said indifferently, "and if you need an escort in town, take Compson. He's safe enough."

I wondered if there was anything back of his indifference.

"As you wish," I said, with a shrug, and let the matter drop.

One warning he did convey to me before his train left.

"If convenient to you, I should like you to be circumspect while I am away."

"I shall be as circumspect as you," I laughed, and saw the quick frown draw his heavy brows together.

"What do you mean?"

"What did *you* mean?"

I was all innocence.

Fortunately his train was ready and the discussion ended.

During the two months of Fuad's absence I was "circumspect," as far as outward appearances went. It was not hard to arrive a day late at a house-party and leave a day earlier.

There were a number of little secluded places scattered all over the small green island where Cecil and I could meet moderately secure from discovery and snatch a day or two together. The result was that I became purse-bearer in earnest. Cecil could not possibly afford these jaunts, and I got into the way of passing him my purse or giving him in advance the money to settle our accounts at the hotels and tables. At first his pride rebelled. Little by little, however, he began to take the arrangement for granted.

Such changes happen in people almost imperceptibly; it is only in the telling of them that they seem to occur abruptly.

Cecil began to feel his oats a little. I was still known as one of the most beautiful women in London, I was apparently very wealthy, I was the wife of an Oriental Prince. It was not long before Cecil's bearing altered when we entered a public place together in the rôles of lady and escort. And he watched me very closely for any signs of wandering interest. Once after a theatre party of mine in which he was included among a dozen guests, after taking me home, as was his habit, he came in, though that was not part of the bargain, and made me a small scene because he fancied that one of the men had paid me too marked attentions.

I was frantic at this breach of our customs; I had never allowed him to follow me into the house at night; we had always parted at the door. The servants were in bed, all except the butler and Anna, and while I was sure the butler had gone below directly, I knew Anna was up to undress me, and Cecil's voice was petulantly raised.

"Don't deny it! I saw him—when he helped you on with your wrap. And he's been in several of the house-parties—in the one when you suddenly found you couldn't leave and

kept me waiting two days in that rotten little hole in Cornwall. How do I know what you do? And my hands are tied. Damn it all, Amber, I'm getting sick of this tame-cat business."

Somehow I managed to reassure him and send him away, promising to see him the following day at our usual meeting-place and "talk it over sensibly." When the time came I saw to it that there was no conversation—at least not of a "sensible kind."

The situation was telling on me, the secrecy and the caution and the frequent needs to soothe Cecil's ruffled feelings. He had no grounds for jealousy, that I can swear, but he was not easy to convince. After a time such suspicions cease to be merely a compliment to beauty and charm and desirability. Also, a young lover to whom the book of love has formerly been sealed is apt to be over-zealous in his quest for knowledge. I found it difficult to conceal the marks of dissipation, and to repair the drains on my vitality. I was beginning to age, and age suddenly. I was "no longer young"; that was all there was to it. The constant levying on my emotions was not improving my appearance. For the first few months I revelled in a rejuvenation, a false dawn, a last return of my youth; but after that—well, it became more than ever a question of cosmetics and massage and scented baths. And so the thing went on, inexorable youth making its demands and inevitable age "keeping up" as best it could.

Chapter XIX

WHEN Fuad returned I was honestly—or dishonestly glad to see him. His presence would be a check, an excuse. Cecil was beginning to be too exigent. He ordered me here, he ordered me there, and played the master. With Fuad at home our life would be as it had been before his absence, a life consisting of occasional and hurried meetings, a little dangerous and therefore desired. I thought, too, that the effect of the restraint would be good for Cecil, that he might by degrees think himself back into the position of mere receiver of stolen goods, mere grateful recipient of goddess-like favors. I was mistaken. Our meetings were less love appointments than encounters of passionate enemies. He always had some complaint, some question.

Where had I been? What were my relations with my husband? Yes, he knew I had told him they were of the most indifferent, but how could he believe me? How could I bear to degrade myself by giving myself to two men? Had I seen anything of Lord This and That?

I wearied a little of his censoriousness, and told him so. Then he accused me of "ruining his life" for a whim. I did not love him—which was true enough, heaven knew—I was only amusing myself. He shed tears. I became disgusted. And before the summer was over I had broken with him half a dozen times, only to have him come crawling back to me with the avowal that he could not live with-

out me, that it was because he loved me so much that he had behaved so disgracefully. (An unconscious lie.)

That summer we were again in Sussex and Cecil with us. Fuad came off and on. At first I told Cecil that our relations must cease temporarily, as it was too risky to carry on the affair in the house under Fuad's very eyes. But I was not allowed to remain firm in my virtuous resolve. When Fuad was away, it became a simple matter for Cecil to slip up the stairs into my room. I was forced to arrange the guest-room with an eye to this contingency, but was abetted by the fact that Fuad had selected, when we re-rented the house, rooms other than those he had previously occupied, and much further removed from my suite.

Anna aided me. Without a word or sign to prove that she knew, she aided me. I never said anything to her. I could not bring myself openly to appeal to a servant for help and connivance. I knew she knew, but I was content for the present to be an ostrich. As long as the thing did not come into talk between us, I felt that what little self-respect I had left was saved.

Then, one day, returning from a motor trip with Fuad and some people, we found that Cecil in our absence had packed and gone. He left a letter to Fuad in which he told him that he was not well, that he was going to visit the people who had been living in his old home, not far away, and that he was exceedingly regretful that family matters and his own health must cause him to leave our service.

Fuad grumbled.

Practically without notice! What's the matter with the boy? His health seemed all right to me. I'll have to break someone else in. It's absurd."

I said something, I don't know what, but I was in a panic. I knew at once what had happened. Cecil had discovered something.

I wrote him a note to his rooms in London, with the request that it be forwarded, as I did not know the name of his host and, moreover, thought it wiser not to write directly. I asked him for an explanation, told him I would meet him, naming the day and indicating the place, the place where we had first picnicked. I could not be sure when I could get away, but if I were not there on the appointed day, he must come every day and wait until I found my opportunity.

It was two days after the day I had named that I finally managed to take a small car and go out by myself, one late afternoon. He was there, sitting cross-legged on the turf, near the picnic spot, and the place around him was strewn with cigarette butts. His horse was cropping idly at the grass, untethered. He was in riding breeches and a loose white shirt. I had never seen him look as handsome or as sulky; and at the thought I might lose him, I became determined to keep him at any cost, although not many weeks previous there had been moments in which I would have been happy to see the last of him.

I had dressed carefully with an eye to effect. A little sport suit, a soft hat pulled down over my eyes. I looked young, and, thanks to my recent undisturbed nights, I felt it.

He rose, rather reluctantly, when I came up to him.

"Well," I said, "have you any explanation to make?"

"No."

"In that case," I remarked, "I had better be getting back. Goodbye, Cecil."

I held out my hand. He ignored it for a second, then barely touched it, and turned away with a groan.

"What is it?"

He spoke over his shoulder.

"I *know*—"

"What?"

"Everything."

My heart stopped. Raced on again. Should I play the maligned, the persecuted? What was the use? He would be able to riddle my excuses and alleviations with the bullet holes of truth. Once on the track there was nothing he could not discover.

I played for time.

"You are talking like the hero of a melodrama or detective play," I said, lighting a cigarette. "And I really haven't much time, my dear. Can't you be more explicit?"

He flung around and faced me.

"Very well, since you ask for it. What about that man Dale . . . and that man Dunne—and half a dozen others?"

"So you've heard?"

"You're pretty calm. Then it's true? My God!"

"It's true enough—some of it. Where did you hear?"

He muttered sullenly:

"While you were away motoring. Some Americans came, in a car. They had heard you lived here. Half a dozen men and women—a woman they called Lottie. I received them, they asked if they might look around. I took them to the gardens, had tea served, as they seemed to know you well. I heard them talking. 'Fell on her feet,' said the one they called Lottie. 'But then she always did.' 'Look what she must have put away after she left Dunne,' said another. They didn't know I heard, or was even listening. I heard enough. I went up to town and I talked to people.

There were plenty willing to give me chapter and verse now that I knew. The men I asked laughed at me for a simple fool. 'How could you be so blind?' one said. Nice hearing for me. I came back and went over to the old vicarage. The Houghtons are fine people, they took me in. I am to stay there for a time. I'll never set foot in your house again. I'm done with you."

He called me an appropriate name.

I turned and went to my car. What I had to say would be said later. I knew my Cecil.

"You're going?"

"What else is there to do?"

"And you have no excuse?"

"None."

He stared at me with wide eyes.

"What a woman—and beautiful," he murmured. "Beautiful . . . I loathe the sight of you," he broke out hysterically. "When I think of the others I—" He flung an arm across his face and shuddered back from me.

I was honestly scornful. Weak, weak, and a fool! If he had knocked me down, beaten me, trampled on me, left me forever, I would have remembered him with respect. But this cringing thing!

I left him standing there, his face covered, and went home. In two days I had a message. Anna brought it to me; a little boy had come to the house with it.

I read it, a scrawled incoherent appeal. He still loved me. He was in hell. He couldn't forget. He was this and that. Would I, *could* I come up to London?

I went. He met me at our rooms. He was resigned and noble. He had forgiven me, out of his great love he had forgiven me. I had had, he supposed, terrible temptations,

he wanted me to know that he still cared for me and that his pardon was mine. He wanted to part friends. No one should ever know from him, etc., etc.

I was not deceived. I thanked him, was as subdued as he would have me be. Wondered silently how he could deceive even himself with his pretense at magnanimity. I knew why he could not let me go.

I had ruined his life. He said it again. I was to hear it a hundred times, a hundred times a hundred before we were through with each other, he and I. But I was forgiven. He was to stay with the Houghtons and tutor the sons of some county magnate in the neighborhood. He would try and forget.

At this point I touched him lightly on the shoulder, and one second later was in his arms.

I had triumphed, as I always triumphed, and as always at a cost. Our relations were resumed, but took on a different color altogether. Cecil was imperious, urgent, a little insulting. He knew how to treat a woman of my stamp, so it seemed. When the autumn came again and we were back in London, Cecil made arrangements to be in town for certain days, and I found I could no longer take any initiative—except in money matters. He grew coarse, bold, and often vulgar. In my very arms he would ask me questions surely inspired by the devil. I could no longer keep him waiting. I had to be where he wished me to be at the time he had designated.

For a time I was a little dazed by the reversal of situations. I was not, curiously, altogether averse to it. I had never been treated in just that way before. Some fish-wife strain in me responded to it, some low quality that street-women have was stimulated by it. I found myself anxious to please him, anxious to soothe him. A dozen times in

the month he would say he must leave me. I knew he couldn't, was too bound over; yet I always redoubled my efforts to keep him. The odd thing was I didn't want him, but I was enjoying my sensation of fear; for I *was* afraid of him. In saner moments I knew him for a coward and a weakling, in the toils of a clever and dominating woman, a Circe who turned men into swine. I knew he would not harm me, and yet while I was with him I feared something unknown. And loved my fear and hated it and hugged it to me.

He was not brutal, physically, until he started to drink. Then, on the trips to London he would let himself go. Several times, in drink, he struck me, and I had, with a slight difference, the same emotion of physical satisfaction and excitement that I had experienced when Sumner amused himself with the theatrical scourge. But Sumner struck out of a perversity of passion, while Cecil struck from drink and anger and, I think, rebellion against himself and hatred of me. I was more than once bruised and hard put to it to invent excuses for the marks.

Presently my life resolved itself into two separate and intimate shells. In one I lived with Fuad and parried his constant attempts to make me sign over my entire income to him; in the other I lived with Cecil, a hell of passion without tenderness or even a pretence of it or of love, a hell of scenes and recriminations, maudlin reproaches, maudlin pleas for pardon—and demands for money. It had come to that! Cecil Compson was very nearly become a blackmailer.

Also he began, in his cups, to boast. I saw it in people's eyes. I wondered when it would reach Fuad. I began to live in terror of everything.

The situation could not long remain as it was. I woke each day to a sense that something must happen, that today, tomorrow, next week at the latest this whole house of cards would tumble down on my head and leave me shelterless, destitute—finished—done for.

Chapter XX

OVER this whole period I shed presents on Cecil, trinkets, costly things, luxuries. It had been a pleasure because the gifts I had given my other lovers had been things they could afford themselves and were generally things of which they had a dozen already. In the case of Cecil it was like bestowing sweets on a starved child. I bought him cigarette-cases, three, I think, leather, gold, and silver, I bought him shirt studs, a watch, a riding-crop; I gave him socks and ties, silk pyjamas, things for his room, a reading-lamp, a chair, a silver tea-set. He soon acquired a taste for the lovely futilities, and after our "understanding" began to demand things. Often I gave him money, as he complained that what the magnate paid him for instilling the three R's into the thick skulls of his offspring was barely enough to meet the lodging money that he felt he must pay the Houghtons. And in some astonishing way he managed to convey that it was through me he had been forced to relinquish the lucrative position of Fuad's secretary. His reasoning was so humorous, so obliquely true, that I let it pass.

From America I still had letters. From my lawyers and brokers often, from Father occasionally. He wrote that Uncle Paul, of fascinating memory, had died and left him a good income for the rest of his life; afterward it would revert to Aunt Alice's children. If anything could have made me happy at this juncture of my tangled affairs, it would have been that. I was always worried about Father;

I knew I dared not offer him help. And to be assured that he would be comfortable in his now advancing years and free, if he willed, from drudgery, took a real weight off my heart. In the same letter he spoke quietly of Bella, of how happy she was—"a dignified lovely matron." He also mentioned how well-known her husband, Harry Brennan, now was.

Jack Evans wrote me now and then, and I had a letter from Lottie deploring the fact that she had not seen me the day she and her companions called.

"We sailed the next day," she wrote, "and I was so sorry. But perhaps you would not have *wanted to* see me, Amber. However, the people with me were keen, and I was a little thrilled at knowing a real princess—had to show you off. Now for the news—"

She went on to say she was going to be married, to a man she had known as a boy in the Ohio village, now in wholesale hardware, and well-to-do. He knew all about her, about Frank and Grossman, and was willing to overlook it. So, far from going into a convent, as she had threatened at Grossman's death, she was going to settle down and be a respectable member of the Ohioan community.

"I'm not saying that I love James," she wrote. "I guess that sort of thing is over for keeps. But I am awfully fond of him. I'd like to have some children, but I'm too old—or too frightened. Anyway, Amber, I'll be a good wife to him. I swear it. My old folks are still living, they'll be glad to have me back. I'll be buried alive in Lovell, it's a two-by-four town, but James is the King-Pin in it, and I daresay I have had enough of the White Lights."

In a postscript she added:

"What about that young wonder of a secretary? Should

think your prince would have sense enough to engage decrepit and hideous old men for the job!"

Lottie. She was really rather a dear. I wished her well. And what about Cecil indeed?

For some time I had noticed his extraordinary gloom. When we met he was short with me, or casual, or plunging into some wild extravagance of love-making, as if he were trying to overwhelm his mind with his body. Or he would sit for an hour or two together, his head in his hands, and when he spoke, merely rehearse over and over the fact that his life was ruined.

I had no idea what this meant, I was disturbed by it. For a time even his familiar demands for money ceased, I could not understand him at all.

The matter was somewhat cleared up when a woman I met at a bridge party told me that she had encountered Fuad's ex-secretary down in Sussex, where she had been visiting.

"I remembered him from the time I stayed with you. So good-looking, isn't he? He was tutoring the sons of Mr. and Mrs. Wallace, three stupid boys. But there is a girl, a really pretty little thing, right out of the schoolroom. She seems awfully gone on young Compson, follows him around. I fancy the parents wouldn't mind. They have plenty of money and no breeding to speak of and I understand that Compson is well-connected, an Oxford man and all that."

When I next saw Cecil, I said quietly:

"So Mr. Wallace has a daughter?"

He went scarlet.

"Who told you?"

"Never mind. Is it so important that you find it necessary to take that tone with me?"

"What tone? You're always catching me up, Amber. Yes, Wallace has a daughter. What of that?"

"Nothing. Are you in love with her?"

"How *can* you ask such a thing?"

"Don't hedge."

He flung out his arms theatrically.

"Good God! How do I know? And if I *were* in love with her, what difference would it make? You know as well as I do that I couldn't get loose from you if I tried. You are like a poison in my blood. And what am I to love any decent girl?"

"Does she love you, Cecil?"

"I don't know . . . she might . . . I suppose so . . . it doesn't matter. She's seventeen. She'll get over it."

"You are perfectly free," I told him, with a pang of jealousy for the time when I had been seventeen and could get over it. I was not jealous of his interest in this unknown girl. It was to be expected, a perfectly natural thing; a man of his type was bound to react that way. His ancestry, his upbringing presaged it. He was absolutely certain to turn to some innocent creature, as a man weary of wine turns to cool spring water. It probably gave him a real emotion to contemplate the spectacle of his wickedness in comparison with her whiteness. And Cecil was of the weak type that would revel in self-disgust and unworthiness. I could picture him confessing—a little. Painting himself as a young man entangled, through pity, with a bad woman. Could picture her horror and final forgiveness. Cecil would, Anglician though he was, wallow in the confessional. He was probably at this moment in a perfect ferment of remorse and self-pity. I knew it, from the swift turning to passion that his emotions now took. I was once more, but in a different sense, forbidden fruit.

He was committing a sin twice over and weakly pitying himself that his sin was bound around his neck and he could not free himself.

On that day we spoke no more of the Wallace girl. Soon afterward I happened to see her at a concert. I was with the woman who had been my original informant, a musical person with whom I often went to concerts, as I still loved music and kept up my interest in it, though I myself no longer played.

"Amber—in that box. The girl in blue. That is Wallace's daughter. Her name, I think, is Evadne. Pretty, isn't she?"

I looked. And looked again through my glasses. Yes, she was pretty in a youthful way, with a prettiness that would depart with the arrival of her first child. She was slender, immature, and wore her heavy blonde hair in a flapper-braid. Her little oval face with a short, rodent upper lip was pink and white with health, and her eyes were blue under pale brows. She seemed a harmless little creature, rather fluttery.

Presently she saw me, turned to speak to someone behind her in the box. I was amazed. It was Cecil. At the same moment my companion saw him.

"And young Compson with her. That's a bit thick."

I watched the girl point out our box. Ask a question. No doubt I had attracted her attention, the clothes, my jewels, my hair, something. I could not see him flush and stiffen, but I was sure he did. Presently I caught his unwilling eyes and waved to him during an intermission. He bowed, like a wooden soldier suddenly endowed with life.

When next we met:

"Why on earth did you signal me out for your attentions at the Hall the other afternoon?"

"Why shouldn't I?" I asked in mock surprise. "Do you want me to cut you hereafter? I was with Mrs. Mearers. She would have thought it very strange. She met you at my house before she saw you at your present domicile. Aren't I allowed to breathe the same concert-hall air with this school girl of yours?"

"She asked me who you were," he said, sullenly.

"What of that? Many people wish to know. She isn't the first."

"She—she *admires* you," he spat out as if the words were bitter in his mouth.

"Many people do," I said serenely. "My title and my general make-up have attracted a number of debutantes—a form of *Schwärmerei.* Don't worry. I am not likely to meet your Evadne."

"How did you learn her name?"

"I went to a fortune teller," I answered solemnly, "and asked her what woman stood between me and my young man. In a trance she disclosed the name. I came home crushed."

He was furious.

"To—say things like that . . . an innocent girl . . . my God! I—and you—we are not fit to walk the same earth with her!"

"No? I had better be going," I said, rising and looking for my wraps. "And we had better not meet again. This new pose does not suit you. And unless aeroplanes become the only mode of conveyance, I am afraid I must tread London streets a little longer. I find these meetings of ours uncomfortable. Let us end them."

So we did. For two weeks. Then I had a letter begging me to forgive him. He was upset, overwrought. He had

had a dreadful time. After all—was it any wonder? He must see me.

I gave in and saw him again. He was charming then, much like his older, younger self. For a little while he made me forget almost everything. Called me all the dear little silly names that lovers use, went gravely on his knees to button my slippers, made me tea, hovered about me, and could not have enough of kissing me.

When I was home again it occurred to me that he must have gained a great advance in his relations with Evadne Wallace; that this gain must have rendered him either remorseful toward me or aroused desires by which I profited —as proxy.

One doesn't live with and for and by men for many years without getting to know them. I thought I knew them all, every sort, every type, in every phase, and was a past master in masculine psychology. But I had not learned all my lessons yet.

In an old New York paper at which I glanced I saw a familiar name, *Noel Hunter*. I read the item with a sense of foreboding. I had long since ceased to think of Noel. My experiment with Cecil had caused me to believe that miracles did not happen—twice. The little notice was short. It merely printed the register of a New York hotel.

"Mr. and Mrs. Noel Hunter of Texas—"

So he had married. When and whom? And had he told her of me? Ah, but she owed me a debt, that unknown woman! For I had possessed him and had let him go free. *Ave atque vale*—Noel!

Fuad and I went abroad for a short trip. He wanted to try his luck at Monte Carlo again, and I was glad enough to forget myself in the passion of gambling. We both won and came home in a good humor with life and ourselves.

I had forbidden Cecil to write me and was ready after absence from him and softened at the thought of seeing him again, to cloak his defects a little in the tinsel of romance. After all, I had to be honest. He was as I had made him. He had been poor and plastic material in a woman's hands. I could not judge him too hardly. I had created a Frankenstein, but could not dream that my simple monster would destroy me.

The first morning in Green Street at breakfast Fuad whistled as he opened his *Times*.

He handed me the sheet.

"So that's what has been on the tapis! Well, the Wallaces have all kinds of money—and knighthood in prospect. Fried fish, they tell me, was the means of affluence."

I read the notice. It ran as they all do. "A marriage has been arranged. Miss Evadne Wallace, only daughter of—Mr. Cecil Compson, son of the Rev. John Compson, younger brother of the late Earl of—"

I dropped the paper and smiled creditably.

"I guessed it long ago," I said. "Ada Mearers was stopping with the Wallaces."

That afternoon I went to the apartment and paid the rent and cancelled the lease. I found a letter from Cecil. He had apparently anticipated just such a move on my part. It was an incoherent appeal for understanding. He had loved me very much, he said, but now this other love had come into his life, and so forth. He would never forget me. Could I forgive him?

I could and did. And was piqued and furious and relieved all in one.

I was done with Cecil—so I thought.

Life went on. I amused myself with a flirtation with a man near enough to the Throne to make it quite respecta-

bly fashionable, and I was envied by all women. He was elderly and fat and had a wife, but that didn't matter. He was rather charming and cynically amusing. Fuad looked on the flirtation as quite all right. He somehow guessed it would go no further and, indeed, I had no intention of allowing it to. The gentleman in no way appealed to me; the situation, however, passed the time.

Then, one day when Fuad had departed on one of his mysterious trips and I was alone, Cecil came. He sent up his card, and I saw him in the drawing-room.

"I met Anna on the street," he said without preliminary. "She told me you were alone. I had to see you—to throw myself on your mercy."

I stretched a slippered foot to the fire.

"What now?" I asked wearily.

It was a long and confused ramble.

In order to account for his habiliments and his gold cigarette-cases he had invented the story of a small private income. That was all right, Mr. Wallace would provide royally for Evadne; but in the meantime he, Cecil, had given her things—the hoop of diamonds that was the symbol of their bethrothal and other presents. So he was terribly in debt. And of course no longer tutoring. He was still stopping with the Houghtons. And the wedding was to be in the spring. How to finance a trip? After the wedding it would be all right. Mr. Wallace was making a place for him in the business. (Here I interpolated "Fried fish?" and was ignored.) And he would have unlimited credit as well as creditable means. But in the interim. Tradespeople were not so keen to give credit *before* a rich marriage as they used to be. They said these things sometimes fell through and did them out of their money. He

hated to ask me, he felt a beast, but could I, would I help him?

I was under no obligation to do this. And I did it unwillingly enough. But I did. I don't know why. Perhaps for the sake of the boy who had walked with me in a rose-garden once, long ago. I gave him a cheque.

Two weeks later Fuad broke with Maida, after all that time, and announced that he wanted to go to America. He was kind enough to add that with him as my husband people would receive me and forget what had gone before, and that doubtless I would like the sensation of being received at home. Within a week of his decision we sailed with Anna and the manservant. I thought that when I returned, Cecil would be settled and married. I was almost of a mind to settle myself. I was now forty years old and very tired.

We sailed. I have never returned.

Chapter XXI

ON THE boat with the early spring winds whipping the Atlantic into a froth of ivory over jade, clear jade in the distance and cloudly jade at the stern, I found myself wondering why I was where I was. Certainly nothing could have been more abrupt: "I wish to go to the States," from Fuad; from me, "Very well. When do we sail?"

Looking back, I realized that everything in me had welcomed the abrupt change, the tearing from an established rut. I wanted to get away! Away! Away from London, from Cecil, from everything that had held me and hurt me and harrowed me these past years. And it was long since I had been home—six years with Fuad, and months of wandering before that.

I determined to see Father, I would force him to see me. I had nostalgia for him after all the years. So many years, more than twenty, twenty-four to be exact. With a thrill of fear I suddenly was cognizant of the fact that my father was a very old man. What had I called him writing of the time of my adoption? "An old forty." Probably he had been younger than that; but, figure as I might, it all came to the same reckoning—father must be close to eighty. Perhaps perilously near to death. His infrequent letters were written in the same fine clear hand that I recalled so well, and showed no traces of lapsing memory or senility. I knew that since his legacy he had retired from active work and was living quietly among a few beloved books. My

desire to see him grew strong. I wondered if his will *not* to see me were stronger.

Fuad spent much of his time in the smoking-room over cards. He had assumed a rather hectic good humor. Once, as he sat down beside me on the deck, I asked:

"Tell me—what made you decide to take this trip? I don't really care what the reason is, I was glad enough to break away, but it would interest me to know your motives."

He shrugged his massive shoulders.

"How should I know? I had a whim. I was tired of England, sick to death of the Continent. America should be amusing. I mean to make it so."

I thought I knew his real reason. His debts in London; his many debts abroad. No wonder he wanted to escape. As for me, what was I escaping? A debt to life? Something. I had the sense of flight all through me, and as the days passed and the salt wind stirred across my deep sleep, I felt in all my veins the returning vigor. After all, what was forty—even to a woman? Even more, to a light woman. There had been Ninon. Was it ninety that she had been still with lovers besieging her? I smiled a little at the thought, but my mirth was not quite sincere. I was avid for fresh worlds to conquer. I had thought Cecil the end of all things just as I had once fancied him the beginning. Lo, he was neither.

There were reporters at the dock. Fuad gave brief interviews with his air—an air that persisted as time went on—of being amused at and tolerant of all American institutions. The papers were, of course, rather fulsome in their praise of him, the society sheets overdid it. "This cultured, charming Oriental, who speaks eight languages with equal fluency, at home, at court, on the links, in the saddle, in the ball-room, whose wife is one of our own

American Beauties, well known to both Broadway and Fifth Avenue as Amber Lee, 'the woman with the golden eyes'," etc., etc., ad nauseam. I was careful not to be interviewed. Nevertheless many puerile sayings were ascribed to me, and I was photographed a hundred times, more or less, with appropriate captions underneath each picture.

We went to a hotel. Fuad announced that he found himself liking the country. Something told him we would stay there some time. We would therefore take up quarters at the hotel until a suitable apartment could be found. He hired a motor car by the month and began to get himself talked about. There were several families in New York whom he had met abroad. Invitations began to come in. The inevitable secretary, a woman this time, was installed. New York, that great child eager for new toys, soon made us the rage. The winter season was over, the summer season had not yet begun, so we were godsends. Fuad began to fill his engagement-book with tentative acceptances to Newport, Southampton and Bar Harbor—enough to fill two summers.

Oh, yes, I was received. As Hamdi Fuad's wife, why not? I had been away so long, such æons, as New York counts time. At that distance my story was merely piquant. I wore a title and a wedding ring.

After a short while we went to Hot Springs, in a private car, with "important" people. Their names do not matter. We were gone two weeks. The only thing of note that occurred—it could, I think, have occurred only in America—was that at a large dinner party at White Sulphur Springs, to which we motored, my dinner partner was one of the bank directors who had refused Mort Dunne the money for his schemes because of "that notorious woman."

And very courteous and charming I found him. Mort Dunne had left White Sulphur with his family. His little daughter had become affianced to one of the richest chinless wonders of the times two days before we arrived in Hot Springs. News travels fast. I should have liked to see Mort again —from a distance.

At Hot Springs I had a note from Father addressed in a strange hand and forwarded from my bank in New York. He said he was ill and wanted to see me. Against Fuad's wishes, I came to New York at once. For decency's sake he, too, had to leave, but he went no further than our hotel, while I traveled alone to Boston and motored out to the little town I knew so well.

What I thought as I turned into the familiar roads no one shall ever know, long thoughts, deep thoughts, thoughts that harried and shook me. But no real regret. Why regret? Why waste tears over what is done? Spilled milk, spilled wine, all the same. The thing was done. I had chosen my way.

I saw the brown house, dilapidated and shabby as ever, standing in its glooming trees. The summer house was gone, the first spring flowers made a carpet of the lawn. Children were playing there.

I remembered the kindly woman who let me in the door of the house where father was lying. She had been a young thing, just married when I had seen her last. She was friendly enough and formally sympathetic; but I saw her eyes rove over my pearls and sables, and I knew what she was thinking.

I had wired Father from Hot Springs that I would soon be with him, and had not wired again. On entering his room, my heart beat suddenly with God knows what terrors and clean desires.

A woman rose from the straight chair by the bed.

Bella.

She was settled in her thickness of body, but superbly so. I never saw eyes shine with such a light of deep contentment. I saw, in that first glance of greeting, that she was quite gray, beautifully, quietly dressed, unrouged and lovely. The middle years had been good to her. This was not Bella of the hay-lofts, nor yet Bella of the hope chest, nor yet again the hurried, burdened Bella I had met on Fifth Avenue and had talked to in Sumner Dale's apartment. This was another woman, the long years, the good years of struggle in back of her. The hands that had worked, the flesh that had borne flesh, the broad bosom that had suckled children, the feet untiring in service—and the lovely, quiet face . . . Bella. . . .

She took my hands a moment, smiled, and left the room, with hardly a word that I remember.

Father was sitting up in bed. He was magnificent in age. The veiling was eaten from his beautiful bones, leaving the modeling of the fine face clear as print. His hair was pure white and still heavy, he held out a long, thin hand, with the blue veins standing out on it.

"Daughter. . . ."

I don't know what I did. Wept, I suppose, caught the hand to my lips, sank on the bed beside him.

"Still," he said, smiling, "the old Jane. No, the young Jane."

"You are ill," I asked him, "very ill? Tell me? Have you had doctors—specialists? Is it your heart, Father? There is a man in New York, a heart man. . . ."

"No doctors now. It isn't my heart, Jane. Just age. And I am glad to go."

I cried out, put my arms about him, held him as if I

could defy death. He moved, restless, wearied by my fevers of terror and protection.

"No. No. Not that way. Still burning, Jane. Still crying out against the laws—against inexorabilities? Sit back . . . there . . . quiet . . . let me look at you."

I did as he bade. He studied me a moment in silence, and a darkness veiled the shining pallor of his face.

"I see—so much," he murmured, half to himself. "This man you have married, are you happy with him?"

Would it rest him, bring peace, if I lied? No. He would know if I lied.

"Happy?" I said. "No, Father. But then," I added, with honesty, "I don't suppose I have ever been happy."

"I know. Why should you be?"

He was strange with me. No tenderness, no affection, as one understands it. Something pitying and impersonal. A detached satisfaction as if I had answered some question that had troubled him. And, perhaps, a wistfulness?

He said:

"I wrote you when you married. I said, in effect, that ethically it didn't matter. I read the man as a voluptuary, taking you to wife knowing all about you, and not from any nobleness of spirit that was willing to forgive because of some splendor of love. But for a whim, as men of that type do. So I said, and tried to feel, that it was no marriage. This was not so. I was glad. Glad that you had the name. It is a convention that lingers in all of us. You say you are not happy. I know it. But, in a way, you must be—satisfied. I read the papers. New York receives you. Does that bring you nothing?"

I was slow in answering. I wanted to tell the truth. But I had for so long twisted the truth to my own purposes

that my mental processes were slippery, bewildering, hardly clear to myself.

"It brings me—very much," I said. "I suppose it is an empty bringing. But—yes, I have loved it. I knew people knew, condemned while they flattered, whispered behind my back. But it didn't matter. I was—I am—Hamdi Fuad's princess. I had the right to go everywhere—almost everywhere. Since we have come home, during these last few weeks, I have felt the difference almost more than I felt it in London. I had never lived, for any length of time, in London in a dubious position, made my home there, I mean. So when I went there as Fuad's wife it almost seemed natural to be taken up—by the smart people. But of course, New York had known me at the peak of my adventures. And to come back to it, besieged, invited, photographed with women of good reputation. Yes, it means a great deal. So much that I could never go back to the other. Yet, in a way, I felt cleaner before they whitewashed me."

He thought a minute, then said, with some irrelevance:

"It was probably my fault. I tried hard not to understand you. I do not judge you now. I endeavored always to see you as I wished to see you. I loved you. You were my experiment in humanity. Beautiful flesh, a clever brain, quick, flashing perceptions. But I failed."

I felt incredibly young. I suppose one must always feel so before the authority that ruled one as a child. I murmured:

"Not you. I."

"Both of us. And in your veins the bad, bad blood."

He mused, said abruptly:

"Your parents . . . I have always guessed . . . I shall not tell you. Why should you know? If heredity is an

excuse, you have it. But even now I cannot think it an excuse. Theories die hard. Jane, tell me nothing of those lost years. I know enough. But answer me this, and honestly. To what purpose? Why? What were you seeking?"

It flashed through my mind that had he been my actual father he would never have spoken so. . . . Not from his death-bed. Tradition, the sentimentality of the blood-relation, the sense of fitness, and the animal love for the creature sprung of his loins would have written him other lines to read—revilement, forgiveness, passions of paternity.

Something of his own impersonality touched me with the sweep of a broad, cool wing.

"I do not know," I answered, "I would like to say love. I thought so, once or twice. Happiness, perhaps; more surely excitement."

He nodded, grave and intent.

"None of these, I think. Pleasure. One finds pleasure in happiness, in love. But pleasure as the sole aim embraces neither. Cicero knew. *Maximas virtutes jacere omnes necesse est, voluptate dominante,*" he quoted with a smile out of my old copy books. "Where pleasure prevails . . ." Then he said with sudden wandering querulousness: "You have forgotten your Latin, Jane?" and fell silent.

I said, timidly:

"Father, I regret . . ."

His eyes, which had been closed, opened. He no longer wandered. Something as keen as a sword struck from them.

"You regret nothing."

I bowed my head.

"You," I said inaudibly, "aside from love, aside from decency, aside from gratitude—you took me from the threat

of the gutters, and I repaid you—in my own coin. I have been sorry, Father."

The old cry rose mutely to my lips! "I have sinned . . . I have sinned."

He read my thoughts.

"Prodigal daughters . . ." He was silent, then said wearily:

"Jane, you were not my child. But I have seen all the seeds of lawlessness that were in me flower in you. Oh," he went on at my astonished gesture, "I know what you would say. I have been a good man. On the score of my deeds I am not afraid to face my judgment. I have broken no commandment, no, not the littlest. But on the score of my thoughts. I was a student, a thinker, a worker. I married young, I was childless, I took a child from a Foundling Home and gave it my name. I worked to give young men book wisdom. I was a faithful husband, a conscientious teacher. But there were years when in my soul I lived a different life—reckless, impassioned. As a man thinketh so is he. That is by what I shall stand condemned, by my conquered and impelling desires."

It was like something in a play. The small sunny room, the flowers in the window, the old man sitting propped up in bed, his hands folded, his grave voice dropping the measured syllables like stones into a pool of silence, and I, his audience, in sables and in pearls, with rouge on my face, sitting opposite the long, tarnished mirror behind the bedposts, listening . . . wondering. . . .

He wandered again, a little.

"She never knew . . . She was so good . . . If only she had not been so good. She would have helped . . . She loved me too much, a prying, desperate love. She could

satisfy the teacher, the pedagogue—never the dreamer. There were women in my dreams."

For a minute he seemed to sleep. Then he was awake again.

"Tears? And on my hands?" he said, looking at them curiously. "Don't cry, Jane, I'll buy you the white beads. Let her have the beads, Mary, let her have the beads; she is so little and so young and wants them so much."

His brain cleared. In a strong voice he said:

"It was good of you to come. Your husband is not with you, Jane? You will give him my respects. . . ."

I was with him for another hour. Much of the time he wandered in his mind, in those dark caverns, unknown to us who stand outside and listen to the echoes of the soul's halting footsteps. He said things that were poignant to me:

"You shall marry her. He shall, I say. . . . History does not repeat itself."

There were other things he said, things I should never have heard. They must not be written here; they had not to do with me.

As the afternoon lengthened he came to himself.

"You must go now, my dear. Come back tomorrow. It has been very lovely to see you. I wish you were happy, Jane. But you were never meant to be happy."

I kissed his forehead, and once more took the old hand in mine. He smiled, but was glad, I think, to see me go.

Steps sounded outside the door, Bella and the nurse. I met the woman as she was about to enter the room and told her where I could be reached in Boston. Bella and I spoke together on the porch.

"He has been like this for weeks, but in bed for only a few days," said Bella. "It is just the breaking up. My own father went that way. . . . No, there is no use in

your staying. Sometimes he seems to know no one. Other times he is quite clear. I will let you know. It was good to see you, Jane."

I left her and went to my car. On the outskirts of the village I saw a man walking. The chauffeur was driving slowly because of bad spring roads, and I could take in every detail of the man. I had never seen such a face. My mind was full of father, puzzling out his hidden tragedies, the tragedies of long repression. When this man came into view, my brain divided itself, a clean cleavage. One half still brooded on the old man I had left, his lips moving in the shadow of death; the other half was oddly concerned with this other man, alive, walking a village street, a dog at his heels.

He seemed about fifty, possibly five years younger. Tall, slender and straight. Hatless. I saw his black hair, gray at the crests of crisp waves; a firm, smooth-shaven mouth; a remarkable, powerful nose. His eyes caught mine, blue eyes, dark, dark blue, they looked. He glanced at me, I thought I saw recognition in his face. . . . Then he went on, whistling to the lagging dog.

On the way to Boston I pondered long. Had I known him? From childhood? Who was he? Somewhere I had seen that face, when it was immature.

I went to bed after an early lonely dinner, and woke suddenly. I knew. Harry. Harry Brennan. Bella's husband.

At five o'clock that morning I woke again from confused dreams in which Harcourt and I were arguing at a river side, and Harry Brennan, with Bella, in a little boat, was moving out on the current. I was trying to get to them; I jumped absurdly, a great distance. I saw the boat capsize,

felt cold waters close over my head, heard a screaming—was it I or Bella? And a phone ringing.

I reached for the instrument. The voice of the night operator at the Copley-Plaza, calling me by name.

"Yes. This is she."

Then silence; then, very far away:

"This is Bella, Jane. I have been with your father. He died, very peacefully, in his sleep, an hour ago."

I said nothing. She said, urgently:

"You are there, Jane?"

"Yes."

"I will come to Boston this morning and see you. Will you be at the hotel?"

I told her I would. But I was not there to meet her. A wire from Fuad brought me back to New York. A wire that said briefly:

"Trouble. Return at once."

Chapter XXII

TROUBLE! What now? I took the first train to New York I could make, leaving a note for Bella at the desk in the Copley-Plaza, asking her to write me particulars of father's death and let me know what arrangements had been made, and begging her to advise me if I should or should not return for the funeral. I did not want to offend the people with whom he had lived his life, nor did I wish to turn the services into the farce they might become were my presence at them heralded. Many strangers would come to gape and peer, not at the coffin which would be lowered into the good sod of New England, but at the daughter, the scarlet woman, who had broken the heart of her father and whose return would be matter for speculation.

Bella seemed, in some way, to have charge of father's affairs. The families had always been close. I recalled that I had dimly known Harry Brennan was father's lawyer.

My thoughts, as the train moved swiftly to New York and to the as yet unknown difficulties that awaited me there, turned to Harry, to the glimpse I had had of him on the street. An unusual face, a close face, reticent and sombre. An unusual man, I judged. Happy Bella.

The miles went by, the hours drew out. Fuad? And trouble. I wondered. Money. Of course it was money.

On reaching New York I went straight to our apartment at the hotel. Fuad was there alone, walking the floor of the

living-room. He turned an unpleasant white-green face when I opened the door.

"Amber! Thank heaven!"

I dropped my furs, caught a glimpse of Anna's repressed face in the inner room, heard the low tones of Fuad's man talking to someone outside. I shut the doors.

"Now what's the matter?" I asked, sitting down and opening my cigarette case. "Do sit down, Fuad, you make me nervous."

He walked, pad-footed, prowling, like a creature of the desert. He glared at me a moment, then sank into a chair.

"I've had cables from London," he said. "That woman—Maida—is planning to start suit."

"Suit? What on earth for?"

He hesitated a moment.

"Come, don't try and pick words. Tell me the truth, as briefly, as explicitly, as you can."

Sullenly, he began:

"Just before we sailed—do you remember my last trip abroad? Well, Maida was with me. We motored, with some people . . . South of France . . . two cars. I was driving one, Maida alone with me. There was an accident . . . night . . . I had been drinking, I suppose . . . I was not injured. She was."

"How severely?" I asked, in great astonishment.

"Well . . . she won't dance again."

I gasped. A feeling of pity came over me. Poor Maida. Her brains in her toes, her fortune in her well-shaped legs.

"What happened then? How was it kept out of the papers?"

"I paid for that. I saw to it. I had to buy off her people. The press agent thought it a good story. So it would have been. It was finally given out that she was ill,

resting. You remember, it was in the papers. Then I came on over here—to get away."

"I thought you had broken with her?"

"I had—in a way. Or she with me. She said she never wanted to see me again. But I got the bills—hospital, nurses, convalescent home."

"I see. And for what is she suing? Damages?"

A dusky red showed under the dark skin.

"Yes. Compensation for the injuries that must end her stage career. She will always limp, and one shoulder will be a little higher than the other. For that she wants money . . . and for support . . . support for her and . . . the . . . child."

I jumped, literally, from my chair.

"Child?"

He nodded. For a moment I saw the most curious expression of pride on his face. It passed, leaving him impassive enough.

"You didn't know. Not many people did, but more guessed. A boy, born a year ago. She had been off the stage months before. What occupied *your* time so fully that you didn't ask yourself—questions?" He sneered at me for a second, then went on. "She is no longer able to support him. And as the means of support were taken from her by the father of her child, I fancy she has a fine case."

I was aghast. She *had* a fine case. I foresaw headlines.

"You are sure you are the father?" I said, a faint hope stirring.

He shrugged.

"Don't be a complete fool. Of course I am sure. You know Maida, you entertained her in your own house—which, by the way, if you ever wanted to make trouble could be construed as condonation. To return, you know her. You

have described her in my hearing a hundred times. Up from the gutter, fighting every inch of the way, with the tenacious hold on virtue that only women of her class can have. I was the first. I know I was. And she loved me. It is my child, my son. He is my replica, in miniature. One would say," he mused, "no drop of English blood flowed in him."

He was right. I knew it with a sinking heart. I had made inquiries about Maida Lynn. Laugh and kick, curse and drink the glass to the dregs, high-hearted, good-hearted, vulgar. But straight—before she met Fuad. Everyone said so. I felt it was heaven's own truth. And the child? I had not reckoned when Fuad began his tale with the deadly instinct of paternity. Rarer, perhaps, than the maternal instinct, but, once aroused, more devastating. And this man was an Oriental.

I went off on another tack, trying to probe into every corner, shadowy with possibilities of harm to me.

"She has letters from you?"

"Yes."

"How could you be such a fool?"

"Good God, Amber! What's the use of that tone? I was a fool . . . perhaps . . . I'll admit it if you insist. But it hardly alters things."

"Has she already started suit?"

"No. I am given time. If I wish I may settle. She makes—certain propositions."

"They are?"

"One hundred thousand pounds. That is the sum she intends to sue for. Did you ever hear anything so preposterous?" he suddenly demanded, with childish petulance. "And money besides for the child's education. That—or sue—or—an alternative."

"Which is?"

He lowered his eyes before mine.

"I . . . a divorce . . . divorce you. She has a whim to be a Princess, and she wants the child to bear his father's name. For the child's sake, she says. One or the other, marriage or settlement. Else she will sue. I am bound to tell you that the marriage is what she is really after."

I sat down again and burst out laughing. I could not control myself. Fuad started.

"Don't! Stop! I never heard you laugh before. It's —uncanny."

"But it's so funny! Don't you see?" I asked, fighting with my laughter. "Your money or your wife."

"I see nothing so humorous—in such a situation. You make a cheap joke of something vital. For God's sake keep still and tell me what to do."

"You wish, then," I said, calmly, "to divorce me and marry your Maida?"

"I—oh, how can I tell? She suits me," he blurted. "And you don't. But the whole thing—so hard to decide."

"I'll decide for you then," I said suddenly, roused to anger. I had small use for Fuad, but in the few minutes since entering the room at the hotel I knew I had great use for his name. A dishonored name. But a name. My name. To be flung off like an outworn garment simply because in a drunken moment Fuad had chosen to break his mistress's capable leg! No. No. Never. I would remain Princess Hamdi Fuad to the end of the chapter. It had never been quite clear to me how much that form of address meant to me until father had asked me that question. Now I knew. I would hold my own. And the thought of the child rankled.

"I do not choose to be divorced," I said with finality.

"Now that that is settled, let us return to the question of the money she demands. Can you raise it?"

He looked very ugly.

"I *cannot*. You know as well as I do that I can't. *You* will have to."

"And if I can't—or won't?"

"Then she will have to sue and see what a jury awards her, or the divorce will go through. I am inclined to the latter solution."

"What do you mean by that?"

With emphasis, he answered:

"I'm not wholly blind. Other people have their sight. Moreover, I have my hearing. People talk. I've said nothing to you. There was a time when your fidelity would have meant much to me, not from love perhaps, but because you bore my name, and I did not care to have it worn carelessly. But all that has ceased to bother me. There was Maida, and well . . . your inclination toward infidelity no longer stirred me. I watched. Waited. I had a use for that inclination. But I was unfortunate. I found out nothing—tangible. I guessed merely. But I imagine proof, which was all that I lacked, will not be hard to get, if I need it."

"You intend to buy it?"

"If necessary."

"And who, pray, shall be named as co-respondent?"

He suggested the elderly relative of Royalty.

I laughed again.

"A shot in the dark. You know you could never succeed. In the first place there would be no grain of truth in the accusation. In the second, the gentleman in question is far too powerful socially, politically. You would never dare."

"Then what about young Compson?"

"What indeed?"

He rose from his chair.

"You're too clever for me—now," he said, standing over me and regarding me darkly. "But if I have to force you to a divorce I'll find ways and means."

I drew a difficult breath. I had been right. He was guessing. He knew nothing definite. And Cecil by this time was doubtless safely married to his heiress and would be as anxious as I to deny everything. He possessed not a single line of handwriting from me; the few notes I had written him he had returned to me and I had destroyed them; not a single gift was marked with my name or initial; the pictures he had of me could have been bought at any one of a dozen shops and were unsigned. If people had seen us over-much together, or even in unlikely places, what of it? There was nothing to incriminate us. No real proof.

"You are determined on divorce?"

"For purposes of argument, I am determined on nothing."

"Very well," I said, "I shall now order some tea and we will talk sensibly. Leaving out of it for the moment the question of divorce, the other question is, what chance has she of obtaining a big verdict should she sue? We'll need a lawyer. I know a man, with offices near here. He is discreet. You can trust him with any plan at all that you may contemplate. I will phone him now."

I rose; he stopped me.

"Be careful. And remember, this friend of yours, no matter how much his—affection may be involved, how much he may lean on your side, if he is a good lawyer he will have to see that the divorce is the only possible solution."

I turned, my hand on the receiver.

"Listen, Fuad. *This is not the first time you have con-*

templated a divorce. I realize that now. You may as well be frank."

He said sullenly:

"She has been at me—ever since the boy's birth. And before that . . . I made her promises, Amber. She has them. In writing."

"I see. How do you propose to live? You have proved that your allowance is not sufficient to cover the needs of two. And Maida, I fear from your own statement, will not be able to support you. Unless she has saved money, which I doubt, she will be penniless. Less an asset, financially, than I am. And there will be three of you."

Then he utterly amazed me.

"There is money that I may use. Under a provision of my family at home. If I have issue, if there is a child. Naturally my people would be much averse to recognizing the child of a foreign woman. Our family is very old, and very proud. But my mother had a private fortune. And she was traitor enough to her ancient race to wish that if I married a foreigner and had a child by her the money should be there."

I thought rapidly. I lifted the receiver mechanically, it fell from my hand. I replaced it.

"Then—why . . . ?"

He read my unspoken thought and laughed shortly.

"A child by you—for the sake of the money? Come, my dear Amber, how could I be sure? Besides, it did not seriously occur to me that you would, or could, bear a child. And I want no son of mine to be born of a—"

I stopped the word on his lips.

"Be still. You prefer the son of a music-hall woman, a gutter snipe?"

"I do," he said steadily. "Common blood. But clean.

A common woman but a decent woman. The boy was born out of wedlock, I grant you that. But under the terms of the agreement it makes no difference provided I marry the mother and the child is acknowledged to be mine."

I knew myself trapped. I lifted the instrument again and called Jack Evans. He was with us in fifteen minutes.

The six years and more since I had seen him had made their changes. He was in his middle sixties now, an old-looking man, but as keen as ever. He was glad to see me, happy, he said, to meet my husband, told us he had read of our arrival, would have looked us up, with our consent, but had been out of town.

The preliminaries over, tea disposed of, I lighted the lamps, drew the curtains, and sat down. Fuad produced his cables, a little disarmed by Jack's charming manner, and knee to knee the three of us sat until late into the evening, dinner unthought of, everything forgotten but the situation in hand.

"It looks—very bad," said Evans at length. "I am not well versed in English law, but—she has a case. 'Support of the child.' That goes the world over. And juries are a sentimental lot. Is the lady pretty?"

"Very."

Evans shrugged.

"Unless you are willing to have the scandal, run the risks, of a great public trial, it looks to me as if you would have to settle, one way or another."

I smiled.

"The money settlement seems out of the question. There remains only yielding gracefully to Miss Lynn's demand of making an honest woman of her," I remarked.

Jack glanced at me keenly.

"What about that, Amber?"

"I say no. Of course, the remedy is in my hands. I can divorce Fuad. He can't divorce me. I fancy I shall refuse to divorce him."

"You'll have to prove ill-treatment, physical ill-treatment, in England," said Jack blandly. "Can you?"

"I don't care to prove anything," I said. "If the Prince decides that divorce is the only way out, he will have to take steps himself. And he would find them difficult and slippery enough."

Fuad said something. I arose.

"I'll leave you two men to thrash it out. I'd like to wash the dust of my journey from me, and have some supper. I have had a dreadful day."

Fuad roused himself.

"By the way, how did you find your father?"

"He died last night," I said, with calm. "I may have to return to Boston. I don't know yet."

Jack exclaimed. Fuad had the grace to look ashamed.

As I left the room, I heard Jack say:

"Well, you have two months before she will take any action. The best thing to do is to make up your mind, slowly. What did you say the name of your law firm in London is?"

I went to my bedroom and ordered something to eat. Anna undressed me. She told me she and the manservant had been in the room when Fuad received the cables.

"He behaved like a madman. Princessin, like a madman. We were afraid, watching him."

I nodded absently. My brain was like something in a trap. What would he do? He must not divorce me. On the other hand, where could we find the sum she demanded? Would I have to sacrifice all I had? There would be the

expense of lawyers, the whole expensive business. I half made up my mind that perhaps after all the best thing would be the trial. Surely no jury would award such a sum. On the other hand the publicity, my own life raked up by clever counsel, the woman's case sentimentalized, family men on the jury, men with small sons! I could see how it would be put. An honest girl earning her living is seduced by a rich man of title, bears him a child, is physically disabled through his recklessness. The whole case shouted for justice for the woman and child. As for me, it would be easy to dispose of me, a woman rich in her own right, a fast woman, a childless woman who had married the man for his title and his name.

But through the veil of speculations, the mist of bewilderment, I suddenly and for the first time realized the full significance of Anna's address—Princessin. It had not seemed to matter much until now. Now it mattered enormously.

I shuddered. The case looked bad, from any point of view. If our side could intimate, if falsely then, at least, cleverly, that Maida had been guilty of indiscretions before Fuad had come into her life. Well, what of it? His own life, my life, these would be balance enough. It would be a very nasty affair all the way round. And Maida, sick, unable to dance again, with a little baby to support and no name to give him. Every iota of public sympathy would go out to her. Moreover, she had been a great music-hall favorite, generous with what she earned, charitable, large-hearted, as women of her type are. And she possessed now, aside from her undeniable beauty, the sentimental appeal of motherhood, and fragility, physical as well as moral.

Whichever way I turned, I came to an impasse.

In the end, divorce might be the simplest way out, a quiet divorce. I would procure it; Fuad must allow me to. And yet?

I did not wish a divorce.

Impasse, again.

Chapter XXIII

BELLA'S letter, which arrived in a day or so told me little more about father's death except that it was like a "falling asleep," but confirmed my intuition, in a few delicately worded sentences, that it would be best, all things considered, if I did not return for the funeral, the complete arrangements for which had been made by Harry. Father had made a will, she said, and the money he had saved from the income of Uncle Paul's legacy, which he had enjoyed so short a time, as well as money he had saved before, went to the Mary E. Larkin Home for Girls near Boston, an institution, I understand, for fallen women.

That was like father—a salutary blow struck at me from beyond the grave. I wondered if he had mentally twisted the gift of his savings into a form of reparation?

I telegraphed flowers.

And so a chapter in my life was closed. Somehow a thin thread that had feebly held my thoughts to things of good report was snapped. And my dream of some day growing close to my father, my idle dream, was over. It had been over years before, but I had tenaciously held to the shadow of it.

Meantime, Fuad's affairs occupied me. He was in frequent conference with Evans, whom he suddenly and oddly liked, and grew to depend upon. He spent a small fortune in cables. The lady across the seas, still, I took it, in a plaster cast, bided her time.

I said to him:

"After all, why not let it go to trial? Your men in England are clever. I am of course sure that she would receive a verdict in her favor, but it would by no means approximate the sum she demands in settlement."

He grew uneasy.

"I can't let it go to trial!"

I urged him.

"But people know. It won't be a nine day's wonder, merely a twice-told tale rehashed by the yellow press. And if I stand by you, I am quite willing to perjure myself as to the serene beauty of our marital relationship. If I stand by you all the way through and we are quoted and photographed together as a loving couple more sinned against than sinning, perhaps after all we may bring off a *coup* of sorts, and the thing will fall through. It may never come to trial. She may be bluffing."

He said, shifting his eyes from mine:

"No. Impossible. Decent enough of you, Amber. But impossible."

I pressed him, impatient:

"Why? Why?"

"She knows too much."

"Now, what in the world do you mean? Knows about me? What of it? So do other people. What else does she know?"

"Not you—I mean—" He stopped, then said, in a monotone:

"About me. I told her—once—long ago—why I had to leave Egypt."

I looked at him in sheer astonishment. The fatuous fool! I had always assumed that there had been some political trouble connected with his exile, but had never asked what

it was and had never been informed. Now, from his expression, I knew the trouble had not been political.

"Why did you do such a completely stupid thing?"

He was silent. I reconstructed the scene from my imagination. An Oriental Samson shorn of his common sense, pouring forth, in the lap of a Whitechapel Delilah, the secret, not of his strength, but of his weakness. Soft lights, softer couches, drink and passion and pleading. Oh, the idiot, the thrice-condemned idiot!

"And you think she would use her knowledge?"

"I know she would. She said so. And I can't let the thing come to a public airing. I—I was not alone in the affair. If it ever got out, I would be run out of England. And as for the other end, the allowance would stop. That was a condition. I was to stay out of Egypt and keep my mouth closed."

Political, after all. But doubtless with a woman's hand in it somewhere. Plots and counterplots. England? Egypt? I sighed and gave it up. But I understood Fuad a little better.

"I see. No, I suppose it can't come to light. Well, we must try for another way out."

We were both still a moment. Then I said, following out my own thoughts:

"It lies then between the divorce and the settlement. The devil and the deep blue. Where the money is to come from, heaven knows. As for divorce, I shall not divorce you, Fuad. I have no wish to. Thinking the thing over brings me no further."

"I can divorce you."

"You cannot. You know it."

We had been over this ground a hundred times in two days. Some hard-won control, a control manifested in veiled

eyes and a sullen mouth, broke in him now. He leaped at me from the chair in which he had been sitting, seized me by the shoulders, and shook and shook me like a terrier a rat.

"Then find the money! By God, it should be easy enough for you. Go to your old lover, Dunne. Threaten him or solace him again for that fat sow of a wife of his. I don't care which. I am desperate, desperate, I tell you," he shouted. "Why in hell do you sit there and smile! Some day I will kill you because you smiled once too often."

Anna appeared in the doorway.

"Princessin, you called?"

She had heard though her eyes and voice gave no sign, and she glanced at us as calmly as if it were part of the day's program for Fuad to shake me until my hair fell down and my teeth rattled. He dropped my shoulders at the sound of her voice and turned away.

"No, Anna. But, please, now that you are here, call Lucille on the phone. My gown for tomorrow night hasn't come yet."

"Very well, Princessin."

She was gone, as silently as she had come.

Fuad flung around at me:

"I believe you pay that woman to spy!"

The following day, looking in the small feminine desk that stood in our common living-room, I was astonished to see a snapshot of myself with Cecil lying among the sheets of hotel note-paper. I took it in my hand, wondering. Where had Fuad procured it and why had he left it there so carelessly? There was nothing incriminating in the picture. After a moment's reflection I recalled that it had been one of a dozen groups taken in Sussex by a visiting

camera fiend. I had possessed it for some time, and then mislaid it. Did he think it proved anything? I left the picture where it was; the next time I looked, it was gone.

It was now early summer. We moved to an apartment on Park Avenue, a beautiful thing, furnished and complete. Friends of Fuad's on leaving town had offered it to us without rent. So we vacated the expensive hotel and took possession. The invitations to summer resorts were left open, Fuad pleading business in New York. As a matter of fact, he was too nervous to visit, and I, for once, was in agreement with him. We settled in our borrowed rooms and awaited Maida's action.

One day I surprised him in the act of cleaning a workmanlike little revolver.

"What's that for?"

"Protection."

"From what?"

"I'm responsible for this place," he replied, "and New York is overrun with sneak-thieves, especially at this time of year. Walton, when he turned over the keys of the apartment to me, advised me to be on my guard."

I was not impressed. It was a plausible explanation. As for his threat to kill me, I thought no more of it. Reduced to his simplest terms, Fuad was always something out of a Drury Lane melodrama.

Then one day, calling at my bank, I was handed an envelope, typewritten, with a New York postmark dated three days previously, and inscribed: "To be held until called for in person."

I took the cheap bit of paper, and seating myself in the parlor provided by a paternal bank for ladies with coupons to cut, I opened the thing. The inner sheet was also typed.

"I am in New York," it ran, "and must see you. Call up Murray Hill —— and ask for Mr. Andrews."

It was signed "Cecil."

I was paralyzed, sat there with the sheet in my hand, my mind leaping from probable question to possible answer. I got nowhere. I went out of the bank and into a drug store and called the number. I must find out why Cecil was in the States.

"Mr. Andrews, please."

He answered almost at once.

"I have your letter," I said. "Why does all this secrecy seem necessary? Come to Number —— Park Avenue this afternoon. We shall be alone. There is no reason why you should not come. I suppose you have a right to travel. Is Mrs.—'Andrews' with you?"

"No. If you say so, I'll come. Is it safe?"

"How absurd you are. I shall expect you at four. I'll tell Fuad I met you on the Avenue if he should ask me."

But Fuad did not come home to lunch or during the early afternoon. I was alone when Cecil was admitted.

He looked ghastly, and even more shabby than ghastly. His suit was shiny at the seams and his shoes badly run down. He was thin; there were rusty hollows under his eyes.

"You're not married!" I said with conviction, by way of greeting.

"No . . . I . . ."

"Sit down. Tea presently. Meantime you need a drink."

I rang for the new, temporary butler; gave my order.

"How long have you been in New York?"

"A week."

Conversationally, I inquired:

"Did you have a pleasant voyage?"

"God! Look at me! Third class. Herded in with a lot of other poor creatures like myself," he muttered.

"You may as well tell me now, Cecil. What is the trouble? Are you or are you not going to marry Evadne Wallace?"

He sunk his head on his chest, his hands were lax on the arms of his chair. I noticed the neglected nails, the saffron stains of cheap cigarettes on his fingers.

"After you left," he said finally, "there was hell to pay. I had said something in town, I suppose—talked too much. Someone told. Old Wallace was furious. He admitted that he might be willing to overlook a young man's wild oats but if it ever came to his wife's ears! It appears that Evadne had been very carefully guarded—a fetish with Mrs. Wallace. That was why she had liked me. I seemed so 'unworldly.' I—denied everything of course. He didn't believe me. Finally he agreed not to actually break the engagement. He would put me on probation. He told his wife and Evadne that he considered the girl a little young to marry as yet; that he wanted me to go right into the business and work from the bottom up. The marriage was to be postponed; we could consider ourselves engaged, meanwhile. And he told me I must walk a chalk line."

"Well?"

His face went a shade paler if possible.

"I agreed. I took the job. It paid next to nothing, but I worked at it. The old man seemed satisfied. You see, they thought I had a private income and the salary didn't matter. It mattered, damnably. I left the Houghtons, took a room in London. Then—she began to make trouble for me."

"She? Mrs. Wallace? Evadne?"

"No. I had forgotten you didn't know. A girl in the village. When I first went down there to tutor Wallace's

boys. I was damned lonely, Amber. And you—I kept thinking about you. It was all dreadful."

"You mean," I asked, beyond amazement, "that you had an affair, down there, and all the while were coming to London to me?"

"Yes. Don't look that way! You might have known it. It started directly after I found out—about you. By the time we were together again things had gone too far. I was half desperate. Every time I came up to London she was at me to know why . . ."

I began to understand a little the rapid deterioration that had gone on in him as soon as our relations were resumed on the new basis of knowledge. The weak creature—with some loose village girl pulling him one way, habit another, and the dream of marriage and respectability entering into it all.

"Who was she?"

"Oh—just a girl. Does it matter? A little soft thing. She was kind to me."

"Who?" I persisted.

"At the Houghtons," he said unwillingly. "She—worked there."

"A servant!"

"I suppose so."

I sat in silence and digested this. Amber Lee sharing a man's favor with a country servant girl. The thought was as bitter as bile in my throat. I said:

"Well—is she threatening you?"

"Yes. I don't suppose I was the first—and won't be the last. But she wants her silence bought. If Wallace finds out, I'm done for with Evadne. My only chance is to get money for her. She bled me of about all I could give.

That check you gave me—most of it went to her, not to the tradespeople. If I could buy her off, she'd go to London. I sold everything of value I had, even my clothes, invented a dying relative in the States, got leave of absence from the firm, and came over. I took the name Andrews so that you'd be safe. I thought if the Prince knew I was here he might suspect something. I don't know what I thought. If I failed with you, I was going on to Canada to my sister and father. There wouldn't be any money there for me, but I might get a job, write Wallace from there, or—just stay missing. I don't know. My brain is sick from thinking."

"How much does the girl demand for her—wounded affections?"

"You needn't sneer. What I've been through with her. . . . I'm afraid of her people," he said with a hunted look. "She's got a father and brothers—threatens to tell them. She was like a mad woman when she read of my engagement."

"I asked you how much!"

"Five thousand."

Five thousand for Cecil, twenty times that for Maida! It was too incredible!

"You'll help me?" he said eagerly. "After all we've been to each other—you won't fail me?"

I shrugged, tiredly.

"I don't know, Cecil. You come at a bad time. Five thousand pounds is a great deal of money. To get it, to explain the vanishing of it. I don't know . . ."

"For the sake of . . . ?" he began. But I cut in:

"Don't bother to frame sentimental phrases, Cecil. That really makes the whole thing a bit too thick."

He put back his head with the old arrogant gesture.

"After all—you owe me something."

"What? Five thousand pounds? And for what?"

"I'd have been decent—decent," he muttered, "ashamed to look no man in the eye, if it hadn't been for you. You—taught me. You put that fever in my blood. I should never have looked at the damned girl if it hadn't been for what you taught me."

I sat staring at him. I had never seen anything as low as the wreck of Cecil Compson. My fault? Was it my fault? Perhaps—and yet?

Fuad came in.

"Ah, Amber, they told me you were not alone. It is—it isn't—yes by Jove, Compson!"

He held out his hand, and took Cecil's. Cecil had risen and faced him now, with something of his old manner.

"You're looking a bit—seedy," Fuad said, easily. "What brings you over here?"

I swiftly invented:

"I ran into Mr. Compson on the Avenue this morning. He is on his way to Canada. His sister is very ill."

Cecil looked at me gratefully:

"I couldn't go through New York without coming to see you," he said, "I was on my way to the Ritz where I had understood from the papers you were, when I met the Princess on the street."

"Mrs. Compson is not with you?"

Cecil managed a creditable smile.

"Not yet. As yet there is no Mrs. Compson. Miss Wallace has been ill, the wedding has been postponed until the fall."

"Ah! I am sorry. Will you join me?"

Fuad reached for the decanter, poured himself a stiff

drink. He was imperturbable, smooth, courteous, but behind the suave exterior I saw something fermenting, some excitement, something I could not place. I did not like his veiled eyes, nor his smile. Had he been listening? What had he heard? How much?

Chapter XXIV

BEFORE Cecil left, Fuad gave us a minute alone together, excusing himself with talk of an important telephone call he must make. Whether he left us by accident or design I did not know. He said merely:

"My excuses. I have some 'phoning to do. When are you leaving for Canada, Compson?"

"Leaving? Oh—in a day or two."

"You seem uncertain," smiled Fuad. "Perhaps you have business to transact in New York? Will you dine with us before you leave? I assure you, my boy, I have missed you. I have not found your equal as a secretary-companion since you left us."

He bowed himself, still smiling, from the room. I stared after him.

"He knows something," I said, with conviction.

"Nerves," said Cecil recovering his own aplomb. "I thought him very pleasant. By the way, there seems to be some mystery about Maida Lynn. Not on the stage any more. The papers manufacture hints. Do you know anything about it?"

He was so casual that I looked at him in amazement.

"I? No. Nothing. But go now. I shall call you at the number you gave me, shall manage to see you. You must give me time to think things over."

I remained in the drawing-room, and closing my eyes leaned back in my chair. I felt I could not bear much more.

Voices in the hall. Fuad's low, insistent; Cecil's clearer, higher. Then a door shutting.

Fuad entered rubbing his hands.

"Nice to see young Compson again," he said cheerfully. "Must have been a surprise to you to meet him like that."

"Yes," I agreed dully, "a great surprise."

"He does look shabby," Fuad went on, evidently with enjoyment. "Old Wallace must keep his clerks pretty well pinched. Probably trying out the mettle of his future son-in-law. Hardly looks like a prospective happy bridegroom, does he? More like a discarded suitor."

"He's worried, I suppose," I answered, with an effort. "His sister's illness. . . ."

"Doesn't seem in much of a hurry to get to Canada," commented Fuad, still smiling. "By the way, I told him to drop in tomorrow afternoon. I forgot you are motoring to Locust Valley for luncheon. Too bad. But I will entertain him, in my poor way."

I had a very bad night. I was frightened. I went to Locust Valley and tried to make my usual impression, but without much success. I was *distrait,* and anxious, starting every time the telephone bell rang. The luncheon was given, ironically, in my "honor" by the people who had loaned us the apartment. Fuad was not included, as it was a woman's affair, and he had refused the invitation of the man of the family to motor out with me and lunch with him and other men at Piping Rock. There was to have been bridge after luncheon. I excused myself and went back to town as soon as I could. But it was after four before I reached home.

As I had hoped, Cecil was not there. Fuad had the air of one who expects. He was not a little disconcerted at the sight of me, but quickly recovered his poise.

"Back so soon? What brings you?"

I shed my wrap.

"How warm it is. It was lovely out of town. Oh, what brings me? I wasn't aware I had planned to do more than lunch with Mrs. Walton. Aren't you glad to see me, Fuad? Am I upsetting some arrangement of yours?"

"Not at all. On the contrary, you complete a little conference I had in mind. Compson will be here presently. Meantime I have something to ask you."

"And that is?"

"Merely this. But, in explanation, I have had another cable from those confounded asses in London. Maida is becoming impatient."

"Your time limit is not up," I murmured.

"No. Not exactly. But she is anxious to have some inkling of the way the cat is going to jump."

"Which way will it?"

"How like you! That depends entirely on you. You have agreed that the matter must not go to court. Very well. How about the money? I can put my hands on a few thousand, say five thousand," he added, watching me narrowly. "Yes, let us say five thousand. Nice sum, is it not? To continue, will you finance me through some of your good friends and with what remains of your difficult savings, for, say, seventy thousand? I am sure that seventy-five thousand, in cash and good securities, would content the lady. Certainly when she stated one hundred thousand as her figure she expected it would be boiled down a fraction, even a third or fourth."

"You may just as well ask me to fly to the moon, my dear," I said. "Surely we have gone over all that more than once. Seventy thousand pounds is out of the question."

"Very well. Then we shall have to find some other way, as you once suggested," he said equably.

With the effect of a stage entrance the butler opened the door and announced, with boredom:

"Mr. Compson."

"Sit down, Compson," said Fuad, not moving from his chair. "Here is the Princess. I didn't expect her, but since she's here, I am glad to have her as audience. As adviser. She is, you know, at one with me in all things. I asked you here today," he went on, "to meet me in a little private matter. I told you I had news that would be of value to you. Suppose I state it now without preamble?"

I felt on the verge of some startling crisis. I held my breath a moment, then reached for a cigarette box. As I could plainly see, Cecil was as much at a loss to understand his host as I my husband. He had seated himself. We both waited.

"I came home yesterday," said Fuad, gravely, "and overheard a part of your conversation with my charming wife. I understood only a little, yet enough to make it quite clear that you considered that the Princess owes you some money, five thousand pounds I understand the sum was, for, let us say, services rendered. For the moment we shall not go into the exact nature of those services, interesting as they may be. I also—no, no, Amber, do not interrupt me—I also understood from the few words I caught that my wife was not prepared to pay you this money. She is, I know, not given to making risky investments, or loans, though I always thought she was scrupulous in cancelling her debts. Perhaps whatever it was that you sold her did not meet with her requirements? No? However—let us not question that. The point is, that when I married the Princess I naturally undertook her debts as well as my own. I am therefore prepared to pay her debt to you—under certain conditions."

"I think you are mad!" I said.

"Do you? But I am not. Well, Mr. Compson, are you willing to hear?"

Cecil glanced from Fuad to me. His face was terrible, the jaw slack, the blue eyes bloodshot. Suddenly, he sprang to his feet. A chair went over.

"This is a trap!" he shouted, and looked the weak animal he was, cornered.

"Pick up that chair," I said abruptly, "and sit down on it. I have something to say." I turned to Fuad.

"I can imagine your conditions," I said. "And I don't know how much you heard—eavesdropper. Whatever it was, it wouldn't stand in any court of law—just your word on it. A garbled repetition of a half-heard, misunderstood conversation! If Mr. Compson asked me to lend him five thousand pounds, what does that prove? Even if he said I *owed* him the amount, what does that prove? I might owe it to him, or I might not. Go slow, my friend."

"I will. And now that you have had your say—you are a brave woman, Amber, I admire you—I shall continue with mine."

"Mr. Compson, for a considerable period of time you have been my wife's lover. I have suspected it, but I had no proof. You talked too much, my wife too little. That was all I had to go on. Your relations have been terminated for some time, I take it. You have become engaged to be married to a young girl of means and good reputation. You break the engagement, or it is broken for you. At any rate, the marriage is 'postponed.' Good. You come to New York and seek out my wife and confide in her that you are in difficulties and need money. Am I right? Very well, I wish to tell you, before my wife, that I am prepared to pay this money to you out of my own pocket if you in turn when my suit for divorce against the Princess is

reached will oblige me by a confession of your relations with her. That is all."

I said:

"A very neat proposition. You hardly expect Cecil to agree? His difficulties involve a situation which if it were discovered would discredit him with his fiancée and her family. If you finance him so that he is able to clear away the difficulties, he is bound as a consequence to embroil himself in a still more disagreeable situation—and the result will be the same. Why should he accept your generous offer? And let me warn you, I personally shall deny everything you may accuse me of, and Cecil as the sole repentant would not cut a very pretty figure with a jury. 'The woman tempted me and I fell.' Ah no, Fuad, it was a clever scheme but you have overreached yourself this time."

Fuad listened in silence. Cecil had not said one word since his outburst.

"I see. Your logic is excellent. Yet on the one hand I gather that the situation you speak of, the one that cries for five thousand pounds, is a sordid one, innocence betrayed or something to that sentimental effect. It would look ugly to Miss Wallace, and to her family. On the other hand, being co-respondent in a divorce case adds luster rather. So far as I know, it has never spoiled a man's chance for matrimony. On the contrary—improved them. However—here is a counter-proposal. If you, Mr. Cecil, will persuade my wife to allow me to procure a divorce, uncontested, naming persons unknown, the five thousand pounds are yours as soon as you have her consent in writing. If you do not persuade her, I shall sue, naming you. As the Princess so cleverly pointed out, you may feel in that case that you will have no need for the five thousand pounds, and my offer will be withdrawn. But it remains for you to say if you will accept

it under the new conditions. I may as well remark that your arrival is a heaven-sent thing. I was at my wits' end. As far as your past relations with my wife are concerned, I am no longer upset by them. She has a flair for harlotry. I will now leave you two to talk things over. I shall go out of town this evening and return in two days. I shall expect to have your answer then. Remember—five thousand pounds and your name out of it, or the great white light of publicity."

He bowed and left the room. I made no move to stop him, nor did Cecil. After minutes that were hours, Cecil said:

"I—what can we do, Amber?"

"You wish me to sign the paper?" I said, without stirring.

"My God, what other course is there?"

"We might take our medicine," I suggested with a wry smile.

Cecil shuddered.

"Ruin! Ruin for us both! No. . . . he has the whip hand . . . you must sign, Amber; you must sign."

His hands shook, he was all eagerness. I looked at him in disgust. *He* could crawl out of it, his hands clean of disgrace, five thousand pounds in his pocket; he could buy off his village Loreli and marry Evadne, settle down to the fried-fish business and the breeding of children. Bah!

"And if I don't sign?"

"But you *must*." He was pitiable.

"Cecil—if I get you the money myself, will you back me up, brazen it out?"

"What's the use—now? He knows."

"He has no proof."

"Proof enough. He knows. He can buy proof. It is done every day. You must sign, Amber. There is no other way."

"Very well," I said, equably. "Go now. I shall fight this out with myself. When I have decided I will let you know. When did he say he would be back? Call me up tomorrow night. At ten. I will tell you then. Meantime, get out of here as fast as you can—you dirty little beast."

He went. I was physically sick. Somehow I got to my room. I kept thinking of those cowardly shaking hands, the hands I had kissed, the hands that had known the touch of my skin, the lips, the craven lips that had blurted out the demand.

I went to bed and told Anna to keep everyone away, I would not eat. I lay there, and thought. My brain was like a creature on fire. I tore at myself. I called out on a God I had forgotten and had never believed in. I was trapped and knew it. But was determined somehow or other to do what I had begged Cecil to do—brazen it out.

Chapter XXV

WHAT would I say to Cecil when he telephoned? Common sense dictated that I should say, "yes, I will sign," and resign myself to a return to England, to the subsequent uncontested suit, to the furtive watching, from some little hole on the continent, of Maida's triumph. I had refused to divorce Fuad; now it seemed I must tamely submit to being divorced. Under the terms of the agreement, I could not even enter a counter-suit, naming Maida. Wherever I turned I was in the usual blind alley. I must go through with the thing, bear all the brunt; Cecil would be paid for his connivance and his silence. Fuad would marry Maida.

It was not to be thought of. With my back to the wall, I made up my mind to make at least an attempt to find some other solution.

I would call on Jack Evans to help me. Two heads might be better than one. He could at least advise me. And when Cecil 'phoned I would tell him I had not yet decided.

The next day dawned and passed, somehow, in some fashion peculiar to days. Evening came. I grew restless, walked ceaselessly about the house. I had another day before Fuad would come back, I had an hour before Cecil would 'phone.

I was in the library, where the 'phone was, waiting, under the glow of the many shaded lamps, when I heard footsteps. Cecil? Surely not! I had heard no ring. The door opened —Fuad!

"I came back," he said without introduction. "It occurred to me I was giving you too much time. I decided I would help you to a decision. Or perhaps by now you have decided not to make any further trouble but do as you are told? After all, it will be a source of gratification to you to know you will have sacrificed yourself on the altar of love—" he grinned unpleasantly—"in saving Compson's hide."

I realized that his return before schedule was not unpremeditated. He had left knowing when he would come back and hoping I should feel I had gained a little time. He had calculated that his sudden reappearance would upset me and hasten me into a decision that, given more time, I might not make. I said, at random:

"Yes, I have already made up my mind. Wait here a minute. I will tell Anna not to wait up for me. I expect we shall have a number of things to talk over, you and I, and it may take time."

I left the room swiftly, found Anna. There was no time to explain or to pretend.

"Anna. The Prince has come back unexpectedly. It is awkward—you understand. I expect a telephone call at ten o'clock. When the 'phone rings I shall be talking to the Prince. Leave your door open. You will hear it, you will come in here and answer it. You will say that the Princess has retired and can speak to no one. Mr. Compson will be on the wire. Do not call him by name. Say what I have told you; tell him I will communicate with him tomorrow and hang up the receiver. Do you understand?"

"Gewiss, Princessin," said Anna, a flicker in back of her pale, loyal eyes.

I went back to the library.

Fuad was at the desk. The desk drawer was open. In his hand he had a sheet of paper and a pen. He turned.

"I will draw up the agreement. You can sign it. Later we can have it put in more formal shape. We will have this witnessed, however, to-night."

I went to the desk and stood in front of it beside him.

"Not so fast. I will sign nothing. Cecil has gone to Canada. I have given him the money. By the time you can reach him he will have sailed—for Africa. It will be a long time before the arm of the law can find him."

I was talking against time. If I could only make him believe with however feeble a lie that his game was for the moment halted. If I could only gain time, the mere respite of a day, of a week.

"You are lying!"

I shrugged.

"As you will."

He threw down the paper in his hand.

"I don't believe a word of it. Your young man was too eager to be bought. He wouldn't raise a finger to help you. No wonder he tired of you, threw you over, a shop-worn, man-worn woman. You'll give me that divorce if I have to drag you through all the filth of the streets to get it."

He was beside himself, he had been drinking, I smelled it on his breath. His voice grew louder.

"Be careful," I warned him, "the door is open."

"What do I care? They may all hear what you are. They know it already. The very stones on the streets know it. If what you say is true, the delay is only momentary. Compson shall come back—from Africa—or from hell—and shall testify on my side."

"He will not. If he comes back it will be to deny everything. I have his word for it."

"Damn him. I should never have gone."

I smiled at him.

"Did you think you would frighten me?" I asked softly. "God knows I don't want you—or your name either. But rather than further your plans by so much as one inch I shall remain your wife to the end of the chapter—till death do us part. Miss Lynn may sue you, for all I care, may expose whatever this secret of yours is to the world. I will not raise a hand to find the money to buy her off. I will merely stand by you, the devoted wife, and reap the rewards of public sympathy. Whither thou goest, I go," I said, "like Ruth or—the Old Man of the Sea."

His hands reached out, one of them took me by the throat.

"I have a mind to make myself a widower."

"And hang for it?" I suggested, fighting for breath to say the words.

"Oh, no." His grasp tightened a little. "The unwritten law. I'll find your lover, track him down, before they get me. Swear that I found you in his arms."

"Let me go—you yellow beast!" I screamed suddenly, the pressure on my throat becoming intolerable.

I saw the other hand, the long-fingered hand with the curious tinge of old ivory and the red, polished long nails, feel around on the desk behind us for a paper knife.

"I am going to kill you, little Amber," he said, softly. "And then I shall kill him."

The room grew a little dark, for all the lights. I knew something. What was it? In that drawer—that open drawer. What lay in that open drawer?

I twisted suddenly, exerting all my strength, a false strength. I reached behind me, I had the thing in my hands.

I heard a woman's voice. I saw a terrified face, I felt the grip at my throat relax and knew he had fallen back a step. I fired—once—twice.

I watched him fall, and lie there twitching; watched the

blood gather. Looked up to see Anna, a sick white, a few feet from me.

"You heard him," I said, my hands at my bruised throat.

She was sobbing.

"*Ja! Ja! Ach, du mein Herr Gott!*"

The telephone rang sharply. It was ten o'clock.

Chapter XXVI

ANSWER it," I said, my fascinated eyes returning to the sodden mass at my feet. "Tell Mr. Compson to leave New York at once. Tell him—why."

I heard her gasp the sentences into the receiver, watched the butler and Fuad's man enter, heard what they said in a dream, heard the pounding at the outer door. As I fainted, for the first time in my long life, as I felt Anna's arms about me, I also heard a strange voice say:

"Send for the police."

They took me, when I had come to myself, to the place where they take such people. A magistrate, two policemen —Anna with me—a cell for the night. I remember nothing of it. The next morning Jack Evans was there.

The usual procedure was gone through. I made no denial. Pleaded, at Evans' insistence, self-defense, waived examination, and went at once to the Tombs to await the action of the Grand Jury.

I was like a woman in a hypnosis.

Jack came to interview me in the great room barred with iron, behind steel doors, a room filled with other people in a like case, other lawyers.

"I'll get you the best man in New York," he said. "I'd better keep out of it at the actual trial. Your past life will come up, my name somehow will be connected. There is no way out of it. Anna is your best bet. She heard him threaten you, saw him choke you. Amber, pull yourelf

together. My God, this is the worst that could have happened!"

I looked at him.

"Send for Bella Brennan," I said. "She told me she would come if I needed her. Her husband is a lawyer."

I gave him the address. He looked amazed.

"Harry Brennan? I know him by reputation. A keen man. Between us—well, don't worry, Amber. There's no chance of your being convicted. But you'll have to stand a lot of dirty publicity."

Bella came. What she said doesn't matter. Her husband was with her. She left him and me together.

In that public place haunted with the hope and despair of an innumerable company of damned souls, innocent and guilty, he said:

"You understand, I am doing this for Bella? For the sake of your father whom I loved, for the sake of your childhood friendship with my wife? I am not, as a rule, interested in sensational cases. Not a trial lawyer in criminal cases. I have engaged trial counsel, have been able to get you Wallace Remington, the cleverest man in New York. Evans and I will advise you. It is wise in him, as he explained things to me, to keep out of the case as much as possible. I will stay by you, Bella will be here in New York during the trial. Our best witness is the maid, Anna. She is very loyal to you," he said with something like surprise.

It was murder, but in self-defense. No bail was fixed. I stayed in the Tombs until the Grand Jury passed on my case and handed down an indictment. It was not long as weeks are counted before the summer was over, the courts open, and I came to trial.

It was a seven-days' wonder, a fourteen-days' wonder, if you like. I was "interviewed" by every sob-sister in Man-

hattan. I was tried in the papers before the jury was impaneled. I was accused, acquitted in a breath. My entire story with a garlanding of fiction was in every penny dreadful and even the more sober papers. From London all sorts of tales traveled over. Somehow the papers learned of Maida's impending suit against Fuad. Public sympathy turned a little my way.

At the trial the whole affair was brought out by Remington. He pictured me as a woman whose past he did not deny but who, since her marriage to Hamdi Fuad, had been a model of virtue and devotion; who was about to be cast off, forced to a divorce because of the claims upon him of his music-hall mistress and her Eurasian bastard. Despairing of forcing my consent to a paper that would falsely convict me of adultery with "persons unknown," he had threatened my life. Not for the first time, as the witness Anna had proved—the jury would recall that she had testified that one day at the hotel she had heard him threaten the defendant with death. He had attempted to carry out his threats. Desperate, driven to the wall, I had shot him. . . . Gentlemen of the jury, etc., etc.

I had kept nothing back from Remington, Jack and Harry Brennan. Not even Cecil. Cecil was safe—in Canada. His name was never brought into it.

The Tombs—the court room—the staring curious people —reporters—photographers. It is like an evil dream. I remember no detail, only Anna's face of stone and her undeviating straightforward story on the stand, and Harry Brennan's eyes as he sat at the lawyers' table and watched the faces of the jury.

Bella was there, too. I remember Bella.

The jury was out all night. I was acquitted.

Chapter XXVII

IT OCCURS to me that I have passed over this time of my life, which to an outsider must seem the most important period of all, shortly, almost casually. That is not so. The act of murder was not the crisis, it was a result; the events leading up to it were the things that mattered. As for the act itself, what is there to say? A moment of rage, a moment of blind terror, the human animal reverting to the first law of self-preservation, the flick of a finger, and the thing is done. Thoughts? I had none. Those came before, and after—long after.

The trial itself does not signify. It took place, justice was called in to weigh my life in the balance. Its purpose was served, and I went free. It has all been in every paper in the United States, in England, in Paris, their files and the court records have it all set down for anyone who wishes to read.

Through the entire proceeding I was half dazed. Even my incarceration did not make much impression on me. The Tombs is no medieval dungeon. I had food and a cot, kind treatment. People came to see me. While waiting I would come to myself, sometimes for days, sometimes for mere hours, and I would think. Not of what I had done, not of what lay before me, but of what was long past. I re-lived my childhood, my later years, my relations with Sumner and Mort Dunne and Harcourt Allan—with Fuad even and Cecil. And tried to find a meaning in it all, an excuse, something to hang my impulse to self-pity on.

I found nothing. To this day I have found nothing. It has no meaning, none of it.

The trial was a carefully staged thing. I dressed the part, as I was bidden. Remington had an eye to the effect on his jury. Harry Brennan conceded his demands with a shrug: "A clever man! Part actor and charlatan, part preacher, a woman for intuition. Of such stuff are the best trial lawyers made. Do as he says."

I wore black. Simple gowns. No jewels. No rouge. I had grown thin and certainly looked younger. By some process plain to me, prison had made me an appealing figure. No late hours, no rich food, no dissipations. My skin was pearl-clear, and as always my voice and my manner told.

I recall one dramatic incident. Although it was autumn we were having a spell of Indian summer. I was on the stand. A thunderstorm came up, for a minute the lights in the courtroom flashed out, then on again. Hysterical women in the morbid audience screamed. I felt faint for an instant —the heat, the crowded room, the incessant voices, the dragging, dragging . . . My head fell forward. Remington sprang up.

There was a second of confusion. I received permission to remove my hat. I did so, and at that moment a ray of late afternoon sunlight struck through the windows and, as the papers afterwards had it, "haloed with radiance the heavy crown of golden-red hair." The black dress, the pallor, the hair—a stage effect. Remington, ah, but he was clever. I could have sworn that for a second he had controlled the elements and the planets.

His summing up! Superb. Not a dry eye in the audience. I wept also, not for myself, merely as a tribute to eloquence. I remember Harry Brennan sitting there, a half

smile on his reticent mouth. He knew—how much it all was worth.

But Remington had a measure of sincerity to build on. It *was* self-defense. Nothing could shake that. It was truth.

When it was over I was the heroine of the hour. Houses that had not been open to me opened now in human pity. I had wisdom enough to refuse all offers of harbor. I came, after a day or two, to this place from which I now write. And as I write, the snow is falling on the round hills I see from my balcony. So long has it taken me to set down the facts of what I call, for want of a better term, my life.

The lawyers' fees were settled. Remington ate deeply into my principal. Bella and Harry brought me here. Harry remained connected with me as my legal adviser. There were a number of things to be considered. I was flooded with offers to appear on the stage, to write my life for sensational magazines and papers. There were Fuad's affairs to settle. A man from Harry's office was sent to England. Hamdi Fuad died by my hand, and under a will drawn up at the time of our marriage, and since never altered, what he had came to me. Not the allowance, which ceased with his demise. But his personal belongings. The jewels I wished to keep. The great string of pearls was now Maida's. I had no wish to fight for it even if there had been a chance of my regaining it. But the other jewels were mine, and his furniture, too, his rugs valued at a fortune, his trinkets, books and some money.

Harry Brennan said:

"You would not consider selling the things and privately arranging to give the proceeds to Maida Lynn?"

Here, on this very balcony, he said that.

"No." I watched his face. "You would think better of me if I had said yes?"

He did not answer.

"I must have money," I said. "As much as possible. When I leave here, where shall I go? I cannot afford to relinquish one cent. As for the Lynn woman and her child, it was an even toss between us. I won, that's all."

He said no more, he didn't have to. I saw what he was thinking.

Throughout the trial and the time preceding the trial he had been a background to my random thoughts. In the courtroom I heard not so much what was said as the echoes of his thoughts which somehow reached my mind. I watched him furtively. Bella was a shadow beside him. All people were shadows. I was a shadow, the whole thing a play of shadows on a shifting screen. Nothing but that man was real.

I knew he loathed me. I hugged his hatred to me. It warmed me curiously. I had never in all my life met a man as detached as he from my physical aura. He hardly touched my hand at meeting and parting; he merely conducted any business he had to conduct with me impersonally, thoroughly, conscientiously. He did his level best. But did it for Bella, for my father's sake—not for mine. He washed his hands of me. I knew that. When Jack Evans broke down under the strain, even though he had remained in the background, and went south before court opened, Harry Brennan assumed the entire load—all the details, all the digging. Remington was merely a brilliant mouthpiece, the actor given his part, coached for it, then left to read the most he could into the lines. The brain was Brennan's; the tongue that uttered the workings of that brain the golden tongue of Remington.

I have a fancy that Bella, moved to her depths by the

situation, wished me to come home with them for a time. Her husband would not hear of it. I am sure of it.

Directly after the trial I began to show signs of physical illness, a natural reaction. A sanitarium was advised. That is why I came here. At first it was mere rest and sleep and food and care that I needed; for it was not all at once that the evil dreams came. For a time I was able to dismiss from my thoughts the picture of all that had happened. My mind would go up to ten o'clock or a little sooner of that fateful night. Then it would stop, or rather jump over to the moment when I was led out to the taxicab. It shuddered back from the time intervening, it fainted, as a physical body does, out of the sheer desire to blot out something repulsive. I was fully aware of this state. I hoped it would continue.

I don't know when I first realized that I was in love with Harry Brennan. I had flashes of pique at his cool dislike of me, flashes of rebellion, that would sink to a dull, uniform indifference to everything. But as the trial went on and I found myself watching him as if he, and not I, were the main actor in it, after I came to the sanitarium and slowly forced my mind into old grooves again, only to find it eluding me and returning to that one aloof figure, I realized. And with what horror. Harry Brennan. The man who knew me as no man had ever known me. I sensed that. Not merely from the recital of my life, none of which I had withheld from him or indeed from any of my counsel, but from some hidden sense, some feeler of intuition that made his own mind reach out and probe mine unerringly, the man who was Bella's husband.

I tried hard to readjust his position in my thoughts, pictured him as the machine man, the lawyer, clever enough but commonplace in all his reactions toward personal life, the

husband of an elderly woman, the father of half a dozen children. That last touch should have killed whatever desire in me was struggling for mastery. I remembered everything Bella had told me, years ago, when we sat together in the brutally soft room of my lover.

"Many a night I have watched Harry walk the floor with a crying baby."

What a picture! As divorced from the sensuous visions of illegal love as night from day. Even more so. There are gradations between night and day. I thought of him from her standpoint, the good husband, the faithful husband, the plodder and the struggler, the father. Thought deliberately, let my mind dwell on these aspects of him. What was there in the man to arouse every longing, every desire, every impulse within me? Nothing.

But I loved him, throughout that time of brooding I loved him, a time when I should have vowed to free myself forever of the sex urge, an instinct put into man and woman to fulfill a purpose and if permitted to seek other paths than the one it is destined for bringing ruin and devastation and despair. I began to think of sex as a domestic animal run amuck, forgetting its tame years, its captive years, the chain, the muzzle, and seeking a way back to the slime and darkness of ancient forests, tearing and killing.

Why did I love him? Because he was inaccessible.

At first that was the only reason. Here was something I wanted and could not have.

I began to plan.

It was a year ago that I came here, in winter. I would lie wrapped up on the balcony, and plan. If he could come to love me—what then?

Bella? Bella had her children.

The children? They had their lives before them.

His law practice? What of that? There would be money for both of us; there must be.

For some time the question of money engaged me. The lawyers' fees, the cost of the sanitarium. What I had was not enough. If there was a way to get more, I must find that way. The stage? No. A sensation for a few weeks on a large salary? Never. My plans were not in accord with this. I thought of Italy, of a little place I knew, of a villa on a blue lake where we could live alone, secluded. I wanted no one else, just Harry, with the eyes that hurt and the mouth that was so close with repressions. I could bring new lights to those eyes, a newer line to the hard lips. I knew. Bella could never have given him what I had to offer, not in the first flush of their raw passion, a passion of mere mating created by Nature for her inscrutable purposes, a passion that had served its ends and burned down to the ashes of habit and affection and mutual care for the children. No, she had never given him the great gifts.

The children. Yes. But they were grown now.

Any woman could have bred him children.

Italy. The plane trees. The carpeting of flowers. The wild warm sun, and the blue waves beating on the shore.

Lo, I would go out, out of this life that had pampered and tortured, caressed and stabbed me, as a flame goes out—in one last completely consuming passion.

My mind returned to money again. No way? Yes, one way.

I wrote to Mort Dunne. I reminded him of his promise. I said he would understand. That I had been under tremendous expense. Surely he would help me now. He knew me well enough to know I would never take advantage of his kindness. . . .

I sent the letter and waited. Two days passed, three,

no answer. I began to think I had made a serious mistake. But on the fourth day Mort Dunne himself came to see me.

He did not send in a card. Merely told the nurse to say it was the old friend to whom I had written. I had him brought to the small austere living-room of the cottage. The nurse left us.

He had not changed. He was the same. Quiet, gray, unassuming. I knew he was one of the richest men in the country. The Mexican oil lands had more than justified his adventurer's belief in them.

He said:

"I have wanted all along to see you. This terrible thing. I didn't dare, didn't dare even to come to court. Too many people might have recognized me. Others would have hinted, knowing our old association. I couldn't afford it, you see."

"I understand."

"Business brought me to Boston. I saw to that. I motored out. No one will ever know. I shan't stay long, but I have not forgotten, Amber, that I told you to call on me if you needed me. Is—your bank still the same?"

I told him it was.

"I will have it all attended to. The cash will be put on deposit for you. Not even a check to show the transaction. You will be notified. How much do you need, Amber?"

I named a large sum. "The lawyers," I told him.

He never changed expression.

"Very well."

He rose to go, hesitated, smiled a little.

"You did me a good turn when you agreed to leave me. You never knew, but had you raised a finger, refused, said you loved me, I would have let the world rip. But you were so—reasonable. But had you known the conflicting emo-

tions that swayed me, had you been less willing to help me, I would. . . . Yes. But because you took it as you did I knew that if I had insisted on our remaining together it would have been a sham thing. What I hoped, what I wished, dreamed, desired, I hardly know. Well, it's long over now, and I am a rich man, not rich today and poor tomorrow as I was then, but with a secure fortune. It was better so."

I had read him aright then. I was strangely glad to realize that my judgment had been so true.

"Yes, better," I said. "And thank you, Mort."

He touched my hand:

"You are still lovely. There never was a woman quite like you." He was silent a minute. "Good-bye. Good-bye."

He was gone. Five minutes later Harry Brennan, who had driven over with some papers for me to sign, came in.

"That was Dunne, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

He said nothing. Merely raised his eyebrows and went on to discuss the business that had brought him.

Several days later my bank informed me that a large amount of money was now at my disposal. I considered immediate investment, and then decided I would wait. The way was clear enough if my plans succeeded. Italy. . . . *Italy*. . . .

Chapter XXVIII

HATRED, the books tell us, verges on love. Each a positive emotion. If Harry Brennan did not hate me, I aroused at least some strong reaction in him. He was not, I was convinced, indifferent. I read his manner toward me as one of unnatural repression. If he were merely indifferent to my place in the scheme of things, if he ignored my orbit where it encroached on his, I was certain that he would have adopted another attitude, been less on his guard. As I saw things, this was no time for little advances and withdrawals, for playing a game of insidious seduction. That would serve well enough with an inexperienced boy who might be attracted to me without any effort on my part, or even with a man of the world, not blind to what I had to offer, who would be amused by the tactics and who would prove that two could play at a game. In the long days, the longer nights, I saw there was only one step to take: to risk everything on one daring turn of the wheel, to throw myself literally in those, figuratively, folded arms, to make my confession, compelling, breathless—to take him off his guard. There was the fraction of a chance.

I need not act a rôle. There was no use of suddenly appearing in an appealing mood of repentance and awakening. He would never believe me. He knew me too well. I must be now, if ever in my life, merely myself.

I made a number of pretexts to see him. Sometimes he came alone, sometimes with Bella. There was no need for me to linger in a sanitarium. But I preferred to regard the

place as a sort of quiet hotel. After all I had the excuse of a slow convalescence from what the doctors had called a nervous breakdown, and no voice was raised to question my prolongation of the "rest cure." And I did rest, physically, and grew younger, regained much of early maturity's slenderness, my natural coloring. I was on a diet, took massage.

After the trial Anna returned to Austria. I gave her enough money to keep her in comfort for a year. And promised her that when I got myself together and should think of setting up an establishment somewhere, I would send for her, and if she wished, she might return and live the rest of her days with me. She seemed glad. I had never seen Anna in the throes of any great emotion, except when terror had gripped her for the moment that night. But the day the Brennans brought her out to the sanitarium to say goodbye she was near to tears.

I have often wondered what held Anna to me, what holds her to me still. I think that in an inarticulate way she worships beauty. As for my frailties, I often imagine that they enhance me in her eyes. Back of that set uncomely face I read a wildness of spirit. The flat breast must harbor regrets—or memories. I do not know. She is a strange woman. Her respectable appearance made a definite impression on the jury, as definite as her testimony. Of that I am sure. But I know in my heart that Anna's soul is not respectable! If there is anything in reincarnation, I should be inclined to think that Anna in another age was a laughing light-of-love and is now condemned to work out her Karma in the guise of a woman upon whom no man would look with desire.

I saw Jack Evans after the acquittal. He was not well

at the time. He has since died, of heart disease. Another link that held me to the past.

Life, hope, the love of love, were coming back to me with every breath I drew. I made my plans, wrote to Italy, then bided my time.

I had several more personal talks with Harry Brennan as a little skilful paving of the way. Some were conducted under the eyes and ears of Bella, some when we were alone. I made implications, asked for the truth.

"Why you and Bella stick by me, I can't understand," I said frankly. "All this publicity must be repugnant to you. You know I am grateful. I have said it a thousand times. But—why?"

Bella said, in her placid way:

"Jane"—she would never call me Amber—"Jane, I made you a promise. And I brought Harry to see that it was a sacred promise. You and I were children together. Somehow, I feel so much older than you. And I look at my own little Jane and the other girls and wonder what would have happened to them if I had not been there to help them."

She broke off. Her husband said nothing, merely looked at her and then at me with an unutterably unreadable expression in his eyes. I was mad with a desire to get in the back of his brain and know what he was thinking.

Once, when we were alone, I said:

"How you must despise me!"

He smiled.

"You think that?"

"I do. You have all but said it in words."

"My dear lady, you wrong me. I would never venture."

"Don't quibble."

He laughed aloud.

"What a woman you are! You can't rest unless you make

us poor devils of men pay tribute to you in some form or other. Frankly, your type of woman has never appealed to me. Now you will think me a prig."

I did not. But I said:

"Perhaps. You think me a type then?"

"I do," he answered.

And spoke of the weather!

But on this occasion and on others I forced him at least to speak to me as man to woman and not as lawyer to client. It was a step ahead.

The winter passed, spring came, early summer was at hand. I determined on the attack. I was impatient, fretful with the long uncertainty. I wanted it ended. I wanted to know, one way or another.

One day I said to him, having sent for him to talk over the last disposal of Fuad's property:

"You drove out?"

"Yes."

I sighed.

"I wonder—could we talk as well out of doors? I should love to motor a little into the country. I have gone out, of course, but always with a nurse. Not as a protection, merely as a companion. I wish Bella had come over with you today —then you would have taken me for a ride."

A curious light leaped into his eyes. He said, suddenly:

"You think I would not take you alone?"

My heart was exultant. He had accepted a very veiled challenge. I fell in with his tone.

"How do I know?" I said. "I fancied you might think it—dangerous."

"Get your wraps."

We drove out in the little low roadster, among the hills, the green hills, along a narrow river path, up, and up, until

finally on the highest hill he stopped the car, and we sat a moment silent, looking at the view. He took off his cap, and sat with the faint puffs of wind ruffling the dark hair crested with silver.

"Lovely," he said, "and peaceful."

He had forgotten me, it seemed, and sat staring at the wide landscape. I looked only at him. He turned.

"You do not care for—mere scenery."

Here was my opportunity.

"I love it. I grow tired of cities. I know a place in Italy—a little, lost lake, and mountains all around. I have never seen such flowers as grow there, and the moonlight is like milk. I shall go back some day."

He said:

"When I was a young man and the urge for travel was on me, I was too poor. Later, too busy. I have been abroad, but on business trips, a boat over, a boat back. Bella, and the children—I have sent them for several summers. I thought the girls should see a little of another world, the boys, too. But I could not accompany them. Some time when I am old and have made all the money we all shall need, I think I will go over and sit in the sun under some ancient, crumbling wall and watch the lizards flicker by, and smell the wind and earth."

"Alone?" I asked softly.

He looked at me.

"No. Not alone."

I reached out. Took his hand. We were solitary, we two, in a sweep of hill and valley. Far off the silver winding of the water, overhead a blue sky and a warm odor as of green earth and wild roses.

"Harry—no, don't speak, just listen, just a moment. Give me my chance. I love you. I have never said that to any

man unbidden. I know you hate me. But—Harry, Harry, I would be so faithful, I would love you so utterly. Look at me, I am a young woman still. You know me. A bad woman, a woman who has murdered. That was not altogether I. The I who lives in the furthest recesses of my soul speaks to you now. Harry, with my body and my mind I love you. Will you love me—a little? An hour? A day? That little place in Italy. Would you come there with me? I can make you forget everything—everything."

My voice shook. I was not acting. Every fiber in me yearned toward this man. I put up one hand and loosened my coat, took my little cap and flung it down, pushed the hair from my eyes. Held him, held him with my hot clasp and with my love.

He did not free himself. Instead his hand tightened on mine, a cruel pressure yet curiously impersonal. His face had not changed except to flush and then to pale. He said:

"I knew it. I have known it all along. From the first moment I saw you. I was walking, do you remember? Then that other moment in the Tombs. I knew this was bound to happen. Don't you suppose that while you and I were sitting together talking in a room I felt your arms around me, another voice, your real voice, speaking to me, pleading with me? God knows I am not a vain man. But I knew."

"You love me!" I cried in triumph. "You have loved me since the beginning."

He would have spoken, but I laid my arms around his neck and held his face to mine. I said:

"This is the end. This is what I have been seeking all along. Oh, I shall grow young for you, dearest. I shall grow innocent again, slip back to girlhood for love of you. I shall make you happier than any man in the world. I shall be yours, yours, completely and forever. Kiss me."

He unloosened my arms. Turned, faced me, held both my hands in his pitiless grip.

"You! Listen to me. Let's get this straight. I do not love you. *I desire you.* What man with blood in his veins would not desire you, with your soft skin and your scarlet mouth and your grasping, empty hands. But I do not love you."

I broke in, wildly:

"But you want me. You said so. Take me then—for as long as pleases you. I give up the dream of Italy. I will stay in this country. You can come to me secretly, and leave me when you will. No one will ever know. I will never make any claim on you."

He asked:

"And Bella?"

"Oh, she has had your love all these years, she is—settled. She has her children. What you give me will not rob her. We need not hurt her. She shall never know. I shall be so careful—so careful. The terms on which you take me mean nothing. I will agree to them all. As a plaything, as a toy, as anything you wish."

"Listen. You are the most despicable creature I have ever known. What have you to offer me? Your body, which I would share with its memory of half a dozen men before me—and how many after? If I want a pretty body to beguile my time I can go out and buy it, and a fresher one, if I wish. Your hands, that you offer me now, with the blood stain on them. Your twisted, perverted mind. There has never been a decent nerve in you. All rotten, corrupted. Which of your men have you honestly loved? Not one. What did you want from them? Money, admiration, a little drugging of your senses. By God, I cannot even pity you."

I answered, very low:

"You—can't mean it?"

"Every word. And more. Do you think that a man is blind to a woman's true value merely because his body and his imagination for a moment escape the bounds of his sane mind, are bolters for a second? There's not a man living who has not known involuntary desire half a hundred times, without love, without even what is known as passion. A physical thing, you women know it, play upon it.

"I'll take you back now. Our business relations are really at an end. You have made the excuse for them to end. And I shall take Bella away for a time. There is no need to hurt her. You couldn't even be true to her, could you? The one woman who stood by you, with much to lose because of her loyalty. Do you think you can for a moment compare yourself with Bella, are fit to inhabit the same earth that she does? Do you ever realize the hold a man's wife, his mate, has upon him? A hold that you wanton women never have, can never shake. We may amuse ourselves with you, some of us. But in the end we go back—we go back."

I was numb under the steady blows of the measured words. Numb until a little flicker of anger warmed the creeping cold.

"How—virtuous you are," I murmured.

He reddened under the sneer that no man fails to resent.

"I am not. I am a man as other men. If I have not been unfaithful to my wife all these years it is because I loved her. Not because I was not tempted. Men always are. When I was young my blood was warm and easily stirred, but I was a poor man, with dependents, with a woman who waited for me, who worked with me, slaved for me, sacrificed her youth to bear me children. And when I was older and things were easier, the path smoother, I was no longer easily inflamed. I have come into contact with a hundred

of you. More than that. Soft women, easy women, licentious, voluptuous, false. Pretty—cats. Every one of them. Not cats—another animal. Have you ever seen, you, my wife's friend, Jane, have you ever seen a little silken-coated bitch on the streets, with the dogs for half a mile around after her? That's what you and your kind remind me of."

"Take me home," I said.

We drove back in silence. It was a warm day, but I shivered. I felt a great emptiness in my brain.

He left me at the sanitarium. He did not touch my hand. "Goodbye."

I did not answer. Turned and went in, holding my head high.

That night the dreams came. For the first time. Not the dreams of Harry that afterwards tortured me, but the dreams of Fuad. It was as if my mind, my subconscious, twisting and turning in an endeavor to blot out the horror of Harry's words, his set expressionless face, had turned to another horror, but at least a *real* one, in order to escape.

I woke from the re-enacted scene of the murder, screaming . . . screaming.

They gave me drugs. Said I had had a relapse. Since then I have been here, with the dreams recurring, the fearful dreams.

Chapter XXIX

SOMETIMES I wonder what happened to Cecil. I shall never know. I wonder idly. For the most part my mind has been occupied, waking, with Harry Brennan, and sleeping, with murder.

I am better now. The winter is almost over. I have not so many dreams. I begin to think of leaving. Where shall I go? There is so much money in the bank. Where shall I go? Italy? *Italy*. Good God—no. Never in this life.

I would kill myself, I think, if I had the courage. But I haven't. I saw a man killed once. To lie like that with the blood slowly creeping from my open mouth, my bright hair stained, my white flesh shattered. And if I killed myself, what after? How do I know that that would be the end? I do not know.

There are other ways of killing myself. Perhaps I have killed myself already. But some part of me is still alive and suffers.

I suffer terribly. I do not repent. I do not regret. That would be a false note. Why sit down and bewail the past years. I suffer merely because I failed. At the end I failed.

Harry. I still love him. It is no longer merely a love of the body. My mind loves him, what passes for my soul loves him. I would be happy, I think, if I could live near him, hear his voice, see his estranged eyes and his hard mouth and yet never know the touch of his repudiating hand.

Yes, happy that way, for a time. But not forever, I know.

If it were not ironic from a woman like me I would swear it, set it down here in pencil and on paper, that he is the first man I have ever loved.

The world would laugh. It is true.

I did not know love was like this. I thought it was all a whipping of the senses, a flare of adoration, a flash of jealousy, a wanting, and a having.

This love that I know now, frustrated, unfulfilled, forever going begging, this love that has no food to feed on and yet does not starve but grows stronger, more insistent, is a somber thing. As bitter as gall, as cold as Death, as hot as a planet in flames. It gives me no rest, it gives me no peace; it is a thorn in the side, and a knife in the heart, a knife that turns and turns and does not kill.

I have made up my mind. I will leave this place. I will find some place I can call my own. There I will live out my days, I and Anna. I have sent for her, and perhaps I can find some state of mind approximating peace.

Bella is abroad. She writes me. I have had the nurse answer. But when I leave here I shall not tell her where I am going. She might come and see me; he would be hard pressed to tell her why she must not.

I wish to be cut off from everything I have ever known.

I shall take up music again. Perhaps the study of jewelry. I shall be avaricious. I shall live well, but take care of my money. He would be only too happy to see me go down to Potters Field—like any other drab.

Prig! Prig and preacher! With the Puritan blood, the hypocritical blood in his veins of ice.

No. He is not that. Only when I seek excuses, balm, self-deception can I call him that. He is simply the first good man I have ever known except Noel Hunter and my father. Not as good as Noel, because he was not essentially

tempted; but better than Father because he is more human; crueler than Father because he is still young.

I remember the thing he called me.

See. I am not yet old. I shall have so much money. There will be times when I shall long once more for lights and people and red wine to drink—long once more for the sound of a man's indrawn breath, to see the veiling of his eyes. And to forget. Forget. When that time comes on me I shall not deny its insistence. I shall drug myself with lovers. I can buy them—with myself, with money. I shall live as the careless man lives, paying for his pleasures, forgetting them, losing himself in brief intoxications. Love. I am done with it. Life, it has to be lived. There remain only the goading memories, and pleasure.

Why not repent and go straight? Live the rest of my span as a woman who has offered up a contrite heart, doing good works and living peaceful days?

Why not? But that would be out of character. I cannot. No woman of my type can. For a time, perhaps, but she is too steeped in self to play for long the rôle of Magdalene, repentant and purified.

I have perhaps ten more years of physical value. I am spiritually a worthless woman, a woman without a name. Who cares? Not Harry Brennan—not myself.

All through my life there has been but one virtue in me; that of, eventually, seeing clear. I see clear now.

I belong to myself. I dedicate that self on the stained altars of an Unknown Deity.

For a little while, Pleasure abides. After that—who cares?

THE END